

Alaska's

Resource Family Handbook



Office of Children's Services

State of Alaska, Dept. of Health & Social Services

ALASKA’S RESOURCE FAMILY HANDBOOK

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1. Introduction to Being a Resource Family

Welcome To Being a Resource Family! ☆ Your Role As A Resource Family ☆ Planning With Your Family ☆ The Children Who Come Into Care ☆ The Office of Children's Services ☆ Family Services ☆ Community Care Licensing ☆ Rural And Urban Differences ☆ Private Child Placement Agencies And Tribes ☆ References To Other Materials

Becoming a Resource Family

Welcome to being a resource family for the Office of Children's Services and Division of Juvenile Justice in Alaska. We value the time and care you give to the children in our state. The goal of out of home care is to give children a family life experience in licensed homes for a period of time. This experience should be considered a supplement to, not a substitute for, the birth family. You may be caring for a relative or opening your home to an unknown child. Whatever your involvement, the Office of Children's Services, its workers and administrators, and most importantly, the children in the care of the State of Alaska, appreciate your commitment.

What is a Resource Family?

Resource families serve as resources to children placed out of their home of origin. Resource families may be foster parent(s) and/or adoptive parent(s), families who are the primary or potential permanent caregiver(s) for children, those able to provide respite services (where available) or relatives.

How To Use This Handbook

This handbook outlines the policies and guidelines of the Office of Children's Services (OCS) and Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and will help you in your journey as a resource family. This handbook presents a general outline only; final authority about issues concerning children in the out of home care system, workers and resource families are specified in Alaska statute and regulation. You may contact your placement worker, the regional licensing supervisor, or the Foster Care Program Coordinator in Juneau for additional information. This handbook is a reference tool only and should not be used as the sole source for training of resource families or OCS/DJJ staff.

Your Role As A Resource Family

Your role is to provide a safe place for a child to live while the child's family tries to repair itself or until a permanent home is found. Your job is to care for the child to the best of your ability and make day-to-day decisions regarding the child's care. A resource family supports the case plan for a child by helping the child attend family visits, as well as counseling and medical appointments. You are an important and valuable member in the child's case planning team. As a resource family, you have legal responsibilities. These include respecting the confidentiality of the child and the birth family, and reporting any suspected abuse or neglect. To be a resource family home in Alaska, you may need to be licensed.

You may also have the hardest job of all -- to care for a child, but be ready to let the child return home. Caring for a child in custody may at times be temporary. If the parents' rights are terminated, you may be in a position to provide permanent care for a child. **However, it may not be a lifetime commitment, but a commitment to be meaningful to a child during the child's lifetime.**

Planning With Your Family

Before you welcome a foster child into your home, consider the effect upon your family. Discuss the decision with family members. Where will the child sleep and keep clothes and toys? What age and sex of child would fit best into your home? Can you meet the special needs of a child such as dealing with medical appointments, disabilities, transportation, or behavioral problems? Are your birth children prepared to share rooms, toys and attention? Can you accept the parent(s) without being judgmental? When you are contacted about the placement of a child, you are responsible to determine if you can provide the care needed to help this child do well. Planning ahead of time will help make caring for a child in custody a good experience for all your family members.

The Children Who Come Into Out of Home Care

Each foster child is unique with individual needs and personality. But there are some common reasons why children come into care.

Some children come into care for *child protection* reasons, meaning a child has been abused, neglected or abandoned by his parent(s) or caretaker(s). If OCS assumes physical custody of a child for child protective reasons, a child may be placed in a resource family home, relative home or residential facility, until further arrangements can be made. Some children come into care for *community protection* reasons. These juveniles are involved in the court system for breaking the law. Their parents may not be able to properly supervise them or a child may be transitioning from a youth correctional facility into a community and needs a state supervised home. Still other children are in care because of *voluntary placement* by their parents. Parents may be unable to care for their children because of illness, emergencies or absence from the home.

Many children who come into care have special needs. Abuse and neglect can cause deep scars and behavioral or emotional problems in children. Beside the safe care that a resource family provides, these children also need a family that understands their special needs. Because children and youth in foster care are separated from families and familiar surroundings, they will need extra support from the resource family home. They also need to know that you respect their love for the biological parent(s). Teens in youth corrections (Division of Juvenile Justice/DJJ) need resource family homes willing to provide structure, guidance and intense supervision. Please contact your local DJJ office for more information about becoming a placement provider for DJJ children.

The Office of Children's Services

As a resource family for the Office of Children's Services (OCS), you should know something about the agency. OCS is the state agency that intervenes on behalf of children at risk of being abused or neglected. It is part of the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. OCS is funded by state and federal money and must comply with state and federal laws. It has the primary responsibility of providing services to children who have been abused or neglected, as well as providing services for family reunification once children are removed. Resource families support this mission by providing care and shelter to children in OCS custody.

Another function of OCS is to protect children in out-of-home care through community care licensing of resource family homes, private child placement agencies and residential child care facilities. All children in state's custody placed in out-of-home care need to be in a licensed facility or licensed homes unless they are with relatives.

Child Protection Services

A family may come to the attention of OCS in several ways: through a report of suspected neglect or abuse; a referral by another agency; or, voluntarily. In some instances, OCS may work with a family at risk while the children remain with their birth families. In other instances the child may be placed in out-of-home care (either in a resource family's home, a relative's home or residential care facility). If a child's family requests a voluntary placement of the child and OCS finds that there are child abuse or neglect issues present, the worker will not accept the voluntary placement but will take action needed to protect the child, including petitioning for the child to be placed in OCS custody, when appropriate.

During the investigation of a report of child maltreatment, if an OCS worker believes that a child is at risk for harm if left in the care of the child's caretakers, the OCS may take emergency custody. The worker then needs to go to court to justify the removal of the child and to retain custody. Meanwhile, a child is placed into an emergency shelter or resource family home or may remain in the home of a relative for protection. In accordance with Alaska law, OCS cannot assume emergency custody unless one of the following conditions exists:

- The child has been abandoned, including children left without support or meaningful communication from parent for three months; failure to maintain regular visitation for six months; or a parent leaves a child without means of identifying either parents or child.
- The child has been neglected, meaning the parent or guardian fails to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, medical attention or other care necessary for the child's health and development.
- The child has been subjected to physical harm by a person responsible for the child's welfare or is at substantial risk for harm, and the OCS determines that immediate removal from the child's surroundings is necessary to protect the child's life or that immediate medical attention is necessary.
- The child or a sibling has been sexually abused and the child is not or cannot be protected by the minor's caretakers or has been left in the care of a known or suspected sex offender.

The placement worker develops a case plan in collaboration with the birth family whenever possible. This case plan includes a plan for foster care, which should be developed in collaboration with the resource family. When taking emergency custody of a child, the placement worker tries to obtain information regarding the child's medical and educational history to share with the resource family. The placement worker is the lead for follow-up planning for placement and arranges for services and support for the child and birth family. Placement workers provide testimony at court hearings, keep appropriate documentation, monitor the progress of the birth family, and participate in long-term placement decisions.

OCS resource family homes care for children who may have been abused, abandoned, neglected, molested or exposed to traumatic events. OCS resource family homes will work with the placement worker in setting up the foster care plan, and communicating any concerns or observations about the child's behavior or adjustment while in foster care. The resource family's primary role will be to provide a safe place for the child to live and develop, but also, when safe and appropriate, the resource family may be asked to work more directly with the child's birth family.

The Division of Juvenile Justice

As a resource family for the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), you should be aware that DJJ is part of the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and is the state agency that intervenes when a youth has committed a criminal offense. It is the mission of DJJ to hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior, promote the safety and restoration of victims and communities, and assist offenders and their families in developing skills to prevent crime. Resource families support this mission by providing care and shelter to youth in DJJ custody. All youth in state's custody placed in out-of-home care need to be in a licensed facility unless they are placed with relatives.

The Division of Juvenile Justice provides a system of intake assessment, probationary services and youth detention and treatment throughout the state. If a youth is adjudicated by the court for a delinquent offense, the youth may be put on probation. If appropriate, the youth may either continue in the custody of the parents or they may be placed outside the home, if necessary to ensure adequate care and supervision. This may include placement in a resource family home.

A youth on probation is held accountable for their behavior by conditions enforced by their assigned Probation Officer and usually ordered by the Court. The probation officer develops a treatment plan that includes collaboration with the resource parent(s) and a plan of care in the foster home. The Probation Officer leads the treatment team, counsels the birth parents, and monitors the youth's progress. The Probation Officer will be in contact with the resource families on a regular basis.

Juvenile Justice resource family homes will work with a Probation Officer by carrying out the plan of probation and notifying the Probation Officer of any violations of the conditions of probation or concerns about the youth. Juvenile Justice resource family homes may be asked to provide "sight and sound" supervision. Sight and sound means providing intense supervision by always keeping the youth in sight or within hearing of the designated resource parent.

Information And Recordkeeping

OCS and DJJ need to share certain information about the child with the resource family. This includes initial, updated and revised case plans, court orders related to the child, and education/medical/behavior reports. In turn, you as a resource family are required to keep a child's medical, education and behavior records current. You should make a record for each child and date and initial each entry or addition to these records. These records should be kept in a safe place. The information in these records should remain confidential except when needed to obtain necessary care for a child, such as when working with a medical provider or a therapist. Please see the section on confidentiality regarding with whom and how contact with the child's other service providers should be done.

Short Term Absences Of Resource Family Or Child From Home

If you or your foster child are away from your home for any length of time, some rules apply. You need to get approval or need to notify the child's placement worker in the following cases:

- If children are to be absent from the home for more than 72 hours
- If you plan to take the child on a trip inside the state for more than 72 hours
- If you plan to take the child outside the state (you must request approval 14 days in advance)
- If you plan to leave the child with an adult who is not listed on your Plan of Care for more than 72 hours, you need to revise the plan of supervision with your licensing worker

- If you plan to take the youth outside of the designated area as per their Conditions of Conduct/Probation.

Community Care Licensing

OCS licenses resource family homes, foster group homes, residential childcare facilities, maternity homes and child placement agencies. Licensing is a preventive program that reduces predictable risks to the health, safety and well being of children in out-of-home care. Regulations, policy and statutes set an expected standard of care that furthers the OCS mission of protecting children from harm. OCS can also enter into formal agreements with other agencies to evaluate homes for licensing.

The role of the licensing worker is to screen applicants, conduct background checks, complete an on-site evaluation of the prospective foster home and conduct a family assessment. All of this is done in accordance with licensing regulations established to ensure the child's care and safety in out-of-home care. Licensing workers help resource families meet standards, investigate complaints of regulation violations, and enforce regulations. In smaller communities, the OCS staff person who places a child with you may also have the role of licensing worker.

The resource family works with the licensing worker by providing documentation of fulfillment of licensing requirements including documenting fire drills, training, and child records. The resource family home also notifies the licensing worker of changes in the home and works with the licensing worker when renewing the license on a biennial basis.

Rural And Urban Differences

Alaska is a large state and resource families can be found in most communities. In larger communities such as Anchorage, Juneau, Ketchikan, Kenai and Fairbanks, there are many placement workers. All resource families are also assigned a licensing worker. In smaller communities there may be only one social worker and no licensing worker, or, the placement worker may be in a different village or community. Your placement worker may also be your licensing worker. The laws of the state and the regulations of the child protection system apply to all licensed resource family homes in the state wherever they may be. However, smaller communities may not be as formal in their procedures. One social worker may play several roles. Resource families may be recruited on an emergency basis for a specific child. What is the same across the state is that foster care is intended to keep children safe.

If You Are A Resource Family For A Private Child Placement Agency Or A Tribe

Some resource family homes in the state are recruited and evaluated for licensing by a private agency other than OCS. These agencies may be licensed child placement agencies or licensing partners under agreement with OCS. Often the homes of an agency other than OCS will specialize in providing care for a child with special needs (such as developmental delays or emotional disturbances), children associated with a specific tribe, or children who are being adopted. This handbook is intended for resource family homes licensed directly through OCS, not through private child placement agencies or tribes. If you are a resource family for a private agency or a tribe, contact the agency or tribe for its handbook. Private child placement agencies and tribes may have different policies and procedures for their resource family homes in addition to state regulations.

References To Other Materials

This handbook is intended to be a general guide only to being a resource family in Alaska based on OCS policies and procedures and the statutes and regulations of the State of

Alaska pertaining to caring for children in custody. For a copy of the relevant regulations, please contact your licensing or placement worker. Another helpful reference is ***Understanding The Regulations: What Alaskan Resource Families Need to Know***. This series includes topics that explain what the regulations require. Topics include:

1. Parenting/Behavior Management
2. Development of Young Children
3. Child Health and Medications
4. Nutrition and Eating
5. Safety
6. Resource Family Training
7. Recordkeeping
8. Specializations/Foster Group Home
9. Confidentiality

These and other materials are available through the Alaska Center for Resource Families. Call 1-800-478-7307 to obtain a copy.

2. When A Child Arrives, When A Child Leaves

When A Child Arrives ☆ Questions To Ask ☆ Pre-Placement Visits ☆ The Placement Packet ☆ The First Few Days ☆ While The Child Is With You ☆ The Foster Care Reimbursement ☆ Separation And Loss ☆ Working With The Placement Worker ☆ The Child's Birth Family ☆ When A Child Leaves ☆ How A Child May Be Removed ☆ Procedures For Transitioning A Child ☆ Requesting A Child Be Removed ☆ Returning To The Birth Family ☆ Returning Belongings And Clothing ☆ What Records Go With The Child? ☆ Saying Goodbye ☆ Post Placement Visits

When A Child Arrives...

Questions To Ask When Contacted About A Placement

When you are contacted about taking a child, ask yourself some basic questions to help you decide if this child will fit into your home. The placement worker may not have all of the following information but may be able to get it after the placement. For example, a visitation schedule may not be decided until several weeks into the placement or the full extent of a child's medical needs may not be known at the time of placement. OCS is responsible for providing you with information about the child as is necessary for you to provide appropriate care for the child, to protect the safety of the child and to protect the safety and property of the members of your family and visitors to your home. This includes any medical or behavioral history that is known about the child. You have the option not to take a child if you feel the child would not be compatible with your family. You may decide not to accept a child to your home if this would cause your home to exceed the age range or number of children allowed on your license. The answers to the following questions will help you decide if this child will fit into your home and if you have the skills to work with this child.

Questions To Ask:

- Age? Sex? Ethnicity? Religious affiliation?
- Where has the child been in care? Own home? Previous foster home? How many different places has the child lived? What kind of contact with prior placement is possible?
- Does the child have any ongoing medical problems? Is immediate medical attention needed? Who is the child's health provider? Is the child on medication? If so, what are they and where are the medications? Does the child have any allergies?
- Why is the child in placement? What does the child know about the reasons for placement? Anticipated behaviors and reactions to the move?
- What kind of maltreatment has the child experienced? Physical or sexual abuse? Emotional abuse? Neglect?
- Does the child have a history of bedwetting? Sleeping problems? Eating problems? Are there any behaviors that pose a risk to other children in the home? Who are the child's parents, relatives, close friends? Does the child have siblings?
- Are there any special conditions on visits? Anyone the child is not allowed contact with? What is the anticipated visitation schedule?
- Any scheduled appointments? (counseling, physical therapy, medical)
- What school does the child attend? Grade in School?
- Any clothes, toys or other belongings coming with the child?

- If the child is a DJJ child, you should know about the conditions of probation, why the child is on probation, any behaviors that might pose risk to him or her or others and other conditions you should be aware of about the child.

Pre-Placement Visits

It is preferable and in the best interest of the child that pre-placement visits between the resource family and the child take place. However, due to the emergency nature of most placements, this does not happen often. If you have an opportunity for a pre-placement visit, you should ask about a child's likes, dislikes and interests. Let the child get to know you and become familiar with you so that placement in your home will be easier.

Working With The Placement Worker

The placement worker is the individual who arranges for the placement of a child with you. This person is an employee or volunteer of a child placement agency, can be a tribal member working to place an Indian child according to ICWA preference, a probation officer from DJJ, or is an OCS licensing worker in smaller communities, the placement worker can be the OCS licensing worker for that area as well as the social worker or probation officer.

The placement worker assigned to the child in your home is responsible for following the regulations and laws when working with the family. If a child is placed for child protection reasons, the worker is responsible for developing the case plan and ensuring that it is followed. The case plan includes the foster care plan, interactions with the court, and engaging the birth family. The placement worker may also be exploring permanency planning options. Activities that are needed in order to achieve the goals in the case plan are clearly outlined. If you have questions about the case plan, contact your placement worker.

Placement workers are expected to visit or meet with the child while the child is in your home. However, you as a primary care provider see the child every day and have important information about the child's behavior, reactions to visits and reactions to separation. It is important that you and your placement worker have regular contact with each other through visits, phone calls, confidential e-mails, or written reports. When drastic changes in behavior occur, when you need help in getting services, or if you have questions about the child's birth family, contact the worker. If you are unable to reach the child's placement worker and you need to talk to someone, ask to speak to a supervisor.

The Placement Packet

You should receive a Placement Packet at the time of placement or within five working days of placement. If you do not get it, *ask for it*. This packet, in a brightly colored envelope, should be used statewide by placement workers. The Placement Packet has instructions on the front of the envelope and includes the forms listed below:

- **The Consent for Emergency and Routine Medical Care.** This gives you authority to obtain medical, dental and emergency care for the child and should be given to you at time of placement. If it is not, contact the office immediately to receive this. Within the next 30 days, you should arrange for a health exam for all children over three years old who have not had an exam within the last year, or for all children under three years old who have not had an exam within the last three months.
- **The Foster Care Plan and Agreement.** This is the plan for the child while in your home. The form details the reason for placement, goals for placement, expected length of duration of placement, medical information, educational information, and specifics about visitation. In addition, there is a place for you, the resource parent to sign saying that you agree to the plan as written. You may get the Agreement at the time of placement or within a few days. The Foster Care Placement Plan and Agreement is an

important part of the overall case plan for the child's family. The Foster Care Plan and Agreement may change as the needs of the child and family change over the length of the placement.

- **The Emergency Shelter Care Health Review.** The Health Review is completed by the resource family for every child placed under emergency conditions. The form provides a brief review of a child's general health appearance upon placement in your home. Return the original to the placement worker and keep a copy for child's records.
- **The Clothing Inventory and Request Form.** This form takes stock of what a child has when coming into care and is used again when the child leaves your care. If a child needs some things immediately before your first foster care reimbursement comes in, make the necessary arrangements or submit the request to your placement worker.

The First Few Days

When a child first comes to your home, the child often feels fear, confusion and disruption. Take some time to show the child where everything is in the house. Show the child the bedroom and where to put belongings. Describe your family's daily routine and house rules. Ask the child if the child knows the reason for being in your home. Offer something to eat. Explain the routine in your home. Ask the child what kinds of foods the child likes to eat. Give a young child a soft toy or blanket to hold. Make yourself available for comfort and to talk. Little things like this can help an often painful and frightening transition into your home.

While The Child Is With You...

The Foster Care Reimbursement

The foster care reimbursement is calculated on a daily basis for the time a child is in your home. Reimbursement includes the day the child is admitted to your home, but not the day the child leaves. This reimbursement is intended for services rendered which means you receive an established daily rate for the number of days a child has been placed in your home. OCS currently is revising the payment process to ensure timely and accurately payment. OCS covers medical expenses through the Medicaid program or through the birth parent's medical insurance. Please contact your placement worker or licensing specialist for further information on reimbursement, processes for reimbursement, or medical care.

Helping Children Deal With Separation And Loss

Children in foster care have experienced a traumatic move. Even when they are removed from an abusive or neglectful situation, most children miss their parents and want to go home. A child's reaction to placement depends on age, degree of attachment to parents and the events leading up to removal from the home. Some children react strongly to separation. Some seem to not show any reaction at all. Children may show signs of stress, depression, and anger. This may be expressed in tantrums, crying, eating and sleeping problems, anxiousness, bedwetting, and illness or even running away.

When a child moves from one foster home to another, the child's grief is compounded. The child may still be grieving the separation from his/her birth family. If a child has to move from one foster home to another, the child again has to leave another family and attachment. After multiple placements, a child may develop a protective shell.

Take time to help a child feel comfortable in your home. Make yourself available to talk with or reassure the child. If you feel a child is seriously depressed or getting worse, contact your placement worker about getting additional help.

Your Relationship To The Child's Family

In making decisions regarding a child's care, OCS must keep the health and safety of the child as the paramount concern. However, OCS follows a philosophy of child focused family centered services, which means that OCS values the importance of preserving a child's connections to the child's birth family. Most children in foster care eventually return to their birth parents or to relatives. For this reason, visitation and contact with family members are very important. You need to support the visitations to the best of your ability and help a child stay connected to family members consistent with the foster care plan. Helping a child stay connected to his family includes sharing schoolwork with parents, not speaking badly of a child's family, and supporting visits and phone calls. You may also invite the parent(s) to school meetings, doctor appointments, birthday parties, etc.

When A Child Leaves Your Home...

How A Child May Be Removed From Your Home:

A child may be removed from your home for the following reasons:

At your request when an emergency makes it impossible to provide continued care.

At your request because you are unable to deal with the child's behavior.

The child is returning to the child's birth home.

The child is moving to a permanent placement other than your home.

The placement in your home does not meet compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act and the child has native heritage.

The child placement in your home is not meeting the child's need.

Procedures For Transitioning A Child From Your Home:

Except in situations of an emergency in your family or during an abuse or neglect investigation, the following procedures apply:

1. Preparation should begin at least two weeks prior to the termination of placement. The OCS worker will take the following steps to prepare the child, the birth parents, and the resource family:
 - a. Explain and discuss the reasons and circumstances for the intended move.
 - b. Acknowledge and assist in working through separation and loss feelings about the change, for both the child and the resource family.
 - c. Include the resource family in planning for the child's physical departure but also preparation for the emotional separation that also will occur.
2. Moving a child from one resource family home to another is explored only when it appears that the placement is not meeting the child's needs or when the resource family requests the child's removal. The following guidelines will be used by OCS in either situation except in an emergency:
 - a. A team conference between the placement worker, the resource family, and the placement worker's supervisor will be held to discuss why moving the child is being considered.
 - b. During the team conference, other actions and options that could be taken to prevent the movement of the child will be explored and considered.
 - c. The reasons for the move and other options considered will be documented and placed in the child's file.
3. If in a child's best interest, OCS removes a child from the resource family home, notice must be given to all interested parties including tribes, guardians ad litem, social workers or probation officer and resource family. If a legal party (child, child's parents or guardian, child's guardian ad litem or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), child's tribe) opposes the transfer, they may request a hearing and must

provide clear and convincing evidence that the change in placement would be contrary to the best interests of the child.

Requesting A Child Be Removed From Your Home:

If the child is presenting problems, talk with the placement worker. If you are unable to resolve the problems and feel you must request removal of a child, OCS or DJJ should remove the child within 15 days of your request. Because of the shortage of resource family homes, the OCS worker or probation officer may request that you work with them to maintain the child in your home for a period of more than 15 days after your request. Please attempt to work with OCS to arrive at a plan that is workable for you, and most importantly, for the child.

After Hours Emergencies

Each OCS or DJJ office has its own procedure for dealing with emergencies that happen after office hours or on weekends. Ask your placement worker what the procedure is for your area. If you are in a serious situation and you cannot reach the appropriate agency, contact your local law enforcement agency. Contact your placement worker at the beginning of the following business day.

Runaways

If a child is missing, is a runaway or is gone for more than 10 hours without approval, report this to the placement worker as soon as you suspect the child has run away, especially if the youth is on probation. If a child runs away during the weekend when the placement worker is not available, contact your on-call social worker if available or report to the local law enforcement agency. If you have an idea where the child might have gone, please tell your placement worker and law enforcement agency. When the child returns home, notify your placement worker and law enforcement agency as soon as possible.

If A Child Returns To The Birth Family:

A child's move from the foster home is coordinated by the placement worker. If the child is returning home, termination of placement is usually characterized by increased frequency and duration of visits between the child and birth family. As the resource family, you are responsible for helping the child prepare for departure. The *Lifebook* (ask your placement or licensing worker for a copy of a *Lifebook* for each foster child) is considered to be a useful tool for the transition, whether the child is returning home or going to an adoptive placement. Be sure you also provide essential information for the next caregiver, including an update of everything in the packet, child information guide and the *Lifebook*, a list of any future appointments and your name and number if you are willing to be contacted. You can be an ongoing resource to the child and his family.

Returning A Child's Belongings And Clothing

When a child is in your foster home, it is expected that the child's clothing will reflect the standards of the community and school. Anything you purchase for the child or anything the child purchases should go with the child. The clothing purchased with OCS funds is property of the child, not the resource family. Anything the child brought into your home and wishes to take also goes with the child. The child may have an emotional attachment to these items. If the child is removed from your home for emergency reasons or runs away, you should contact the placement worker to make arrangements for the child's personal belongings and clothing to be picked up or dropped off if it is determined the child will not be returning to your home.

When a child returns home or moves to another foster home, the Clothing Inventory should be checked and completed.

What Records Need To Go With The Child?

When a child leaves your home, be sure all the information in the Placement Packet is updated. Send all the child's personally significant record, including the child's mental health, medical and dental treatment records; immunization records; and school records and report cards to the placement worker. Cards, mementos, photos and drawings should be given to the placement worker to pass on to the child's next caregiver or to the birth parents.

Saying Good-Bye To Your Foster Child

A child's move, whenever possible, should be planned to give both your family and the child time to say good-bye. Ideally, preparation should begin two weeks before a move. Often, resource families become very attached to their foster children. You may feel angry, sad or in denial when a child must leave your home. This is not only common, it is very human! If you feel grief and sadness, talk it over with your spouse, a friend, a placement worker or a pastor. You may want to take a break between placements. Some resource families prefer to work with another child right away. Either way, we recognize that foster care is a demanding job. Know that it is also an honorable one. Take care of your own feelings in the same way you try to take care of the children in your care. Discuss with your worker and/or the birth parent the possibility of keeping in touch with the child.

Post-Placement Visits And Contact

If a child is moved from one resource family home to another, post-placement contact between a foster child and a former resource family can be allowed if it is determined not to be harmful to child. You do not have a right, however, to these visits. If a child is moved to another placement, the placement worker has the final decision regarding visits with former resource families or others. If a child is returned home or is adopted, the desires of the child's family should be respected.

3. Daily Living

Baby-sitting/ Child Care ☆ Changes to Personal Appearance ☆ Clothing ☆ Driving ☆ Early Development ☆ Employment ☆ Food ☆ Household Duties ☆ Mail ☆ Personal Property/Privacy ☆ Religion ☆ Savings Accounts and Allowances ☆ School ☆ Sex Education ☆ Sleep ☆ Library Cards ☆ Social Activities ☆ TV/Videos ☆ Transportation ☆ Use of Child's Legal Name ☆ Vacations

When a foster child is in your home, you are responsible for the daily care of the child. You should treat your foster children like you treat your birth children. That means you should expect the same level of chores and give them the same things you give your own children. Your foster children, however, are different. Some foster children have special physical or emotional needs and may require additional care. Resource families also need to abide by OCS guidelines for parenting children in foster care. These guidelines are based on policy, regulations and Alaska statutes. Please use the following information only as a general guide in your daily care of a child. If you have specific concerns about the care of the child in your home contact your placement worker.

Baby-sitting/Child Care

Baby-sitters or Respite Care: A baby sitter providing care in a resource family home during the short absence of a resource family (no more than six hours) must be at least 14 years old and mature enough to handle common emergencies. Never use a child under 14 years of age to baby-sit your foster children.

If you plan to leave your foster child with an adult for 72 hours (three days) or more, you need to notify your licensing worker. Your substitute caregiver should be the same person listed on the plan for supervision that you submitted with your license application. If it is not the same person, you need to submit a revised plan for approval.

If your foster teen wants to baby-sit, you must get the placement worker's permission. This decision should be based on the maturity, history and special needs of the child. Foster children, however, should not be allowed to baby-sit for other foster children.

Child Care: In some pre-approved situations, a child in foster care may be placed in licensed child care for a regular part of the day. Ask your placement worker for a list of licensed child care providers or contact a local resource and referral agency. Childcare may be partially paid for by OCS. Approval for assistance with childcare payments is reviewed by your placement worker and their supervisors on a case-by-case basis. Contact your placement worker for the process for obtaining approval for potential OCS payment for childcare. You should contact your local day care assistance program or tribes for any assistance the foster child may be eligible for through those programs. Before you ask your OCS worker to approve childcare, you will need to go through the daycare assistance or tribal childcare programs as first resources. Licensed childcare centers and homes have met many of the same standards that you meet as a resource family home. Pick a center or home where the adult frequently interacts with the children and plans child-centered activities. You can locate childcare facilities at <http://www.childcareconnection.org>.

Like other states nationwide, there is no formal respite care program for foster children in Alaska. Resource families at times exchange care for each other; if you choose to use this method of respite, please be aware that your licensing capacity must be maintained. No variances are allowed to provide for informal care exchanges between resource families.

Changes To Personal Appearance

Any major change in a child's appearance (such as drastically cutting a child's hair, tattooing, body/ear piercing or other altering methods) needs the permission of the child's birth parents or the OCS placement worker. Regular haircuts that keep a child's basic style are left to the resource family's discretion. Any elective or non-emergency medical procedure (such as dental anesthesia) requires the permission of the birth parent or guardian.

Clothing

If, when a child enters the foster care system, the amount and quality of the child's clothing does not meet a minimum standard, OCS may approve a limited one-time clothing allowance. The clothing allowance does not apply when the child moves from foster home to foster home. A clothing allowance is used only when the child comes into custody and does not have basic items such as pants, shirts, shoes, snowsuit or boots. Make sure to complete a Clothing Inventory when the child comes into your home. When listing a child's clothes on the inventory, list only clothing that is wearable and fits the child. After placement, the monthly reimbursement is to be used for the costs of maintaining and routine replacement of items as the need arises. As with your own children, foster children should be encouraged to be proud of themselves and the way they dress. Involve the child in selecting clothes that the child will like and feel good wearing. Should the placement for the foster child be changed, clothing purchased for the child is to go with the child at the time of change. Clothing purchased for a foster child belongs to the foster child, not the resource family home in which the child resided.

Driving

The child must have a driver's license or permit in order to operate a motor vehicle. A child in OCS custody may drive a vehicle only with the Children's Services Manager approval. For the CSM to approve driving privileges, the following will need to be supplied to the regional office before approval will be considered:

1. signature of authorized adult (either the birth parent, or the legal guardian (as appointed by the courts), a responsible adult who consents to accept responsibility for auto insurance coverage that includes the minor (resource parents, relatives), or the Children's Services Manager . State law indicates that as long as a child is covered by insurance, the person signing the consent form is not liable for any negligence or willful misconduct of a minor under the age of 18 when driving a motor vehicle.
2. a letter of support from the authorized adult, which should include the following information:
 - indicate that the purpose of the child's driving is appropriate, considering the child's age;
 - that all vehicles the child will drive are identified and in a safe condition;
 - the child does not have a problem with the use of alcohol or drugs;
 - that the child will maintain a safe driving record.
3. Certified proof of insurance. The OCS must be informed if the policy lapses or is canceled. The child's approval to drive will be suspended until insurance coverage is again effective.

Additionally, if the child is a DJJ child, permission will be sought from the DJJ probation officer.

Early Childhood Development

Many children who enter foster care have delays, and research shows that many children actually fall behind in development while in foster care. Actively promote a young child's development by providing a mix of quiet and active play, and a mix of playing alone and with others. Talk, sing, touch and play with young children every day. Make developmentally appropriate toys easily accessible to children. The Infant Learning Program is a great resource for developmental assessments and ideas to promote growth in early childhood. Ask your worker in the child coming into your home should be referred to the ILP. It is a requirement that all children three years and under, whose parents are alleged to be substance abusers, be assessed.

Employment

If a foster child wants to work, the decision should be made jointly between the resource family and the child's placement worker. If you and the placement worker decide that employment is feasible for your foster child, it will be your responsibility to watch for any change in attitude and behavior. Employment should be a positive experience and teach necessary independent living skills. Bring any concerns or worries to the attention of the placement worker. The resource family should help the child file the appropriate income tax returns if necessary. Independent Living Funds are potentially available to assist youth age 14 and older who are in care. (See Financial section).

If a child in foster care is employed at a business owned or managed by the resource family, the child must be paid the same rate as other employees performing the same job duties. The Alaska Department of Labor requires a work permit for children under the age of 16. This needs to be signed by the placement worker.

Food

Food and nutrition are important in the daily care of children in foster care. You should provide regular, balanced meals and snacks. Find out about any existing food allergies or dietary needs and plan meals accordingly. Designate a place for healthy snacks that children can eat when hungry between meals.

You should try to provide food reflecting the ethnic or cultural background of children in care, including foods provided by the child's own family. This shows respect for the child and the family's culture. If you do not know how to prepare these foods, ask the child's birth family, another resource family or seek help from your local Cooperative Extension.

Except for medical reasons, you will not deny a meal to a child in foster care. You cannot force-feed a child or coerce a child to eat. Mealtimes should not turn into a battle over food. Do not use food to control or punish your foster child.

Some foster children may be eligible for Women's, Infants and Children (WIC) assistance. You can contact your local WIC office for further information or view the criteria on line at <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/nutri/wic>.

Some children may have eating problems, such as hoarding food, refusing to eat the food you serve, or eating too much without stopping. Some of these problems may be based on physical or psychological causes. Consult the child's placement worker, counselor, health provider or the Alaska Center for Resource Families for help if a child in your home exhibits any of these behaviors.

Household Duties

A child in foster care can be expected to share in the same chores expected of other family members of the same age. Chores should be appropriate for a child's age, health and abilities. Household chores should be shared by all family members and should not interfere with school, health and necessary recreation of the child in foster care. A child should not be expected to perform chores that are your responsibility or chores that should be shared among several individuals (for example, the entire family's laundry). It is a good idea to rotate chores to further independent living skills.

Mail

Children in care have the right to send and receive mail. Mail is the private property of the child and you should never open or read a child's mail unless the child is incapable of doing so. In special circumstances, a placement worker may request that a child's mail be monitored and may ask you to bring mail into the OCS office or appoint a designee such as a guardian ad litem to open the mail. If you suspect contents of a mail parcel to be a weapon or other contraband, or if mail arrives that is disturbing to the child, you should seek the assistance of the placement worker.

Personal Property/Privacy

The personal belongings that a child brings to your home are the child's property and may be of special importance. All family members should respect these items. In addition, every child should have some private place such as a room, a drawer or a closet. This private space should be respected in the same way the child's possessions are respected. When a child leaves your home, the child must be allowed to take personal items, clothing and any gifts or possessions acquired while in your home. If you buy a large item for a child, such as a desk, stereo or bed, make it clear whether the child can take this with him or if the large items are his to use while at your home. Making these things clear in the beginning prevents misunderstandings when the child leaves your home.

Privacy is important for a child. Other steps you can take to assure a child's privacy include knocking before you enter a room except when checking on a sleeping child, respecting the privacy of a child's room when the child is not there, and providing privacy for phone conversations and visits. Visual and/or audio monitors may not be used to monitor foster children unless in use to care for a child with extraordinary medical needs or for a newborn child.

Religion

As a resource family, you should recognize the religious beliefs and ethnic heritage of a child's birth family and respect the religious preference expressed by the child's birth parents. However, you need to respect the religious preference of a foster child nine years of age or older. In both cases, this means locating a resource and enabling, including providing transportation, for the child to attend services of the child's religion.

You may take a child to your own place of worship if the child is under 9 years of age and the birth parents do not object. You cannot require church attendance or prevent church attendance as a consequence or a punishment for a child's behavior.

Respite Care

Some resource families find that regular respite care is helpful when caring for a particularly challenging or special needs child. If funding is available, OCS may approve special funds to assist with respite care to provide temporary relief from the stress of caring for a foster child. These funds must be applied for through your caseworker. If resource families decide to briefly care for each other's foster children they are to follow the guidelines for number of children in

care capacity. No variances for over capacity limits are allowed for informal care exchanges between resource families.

Savings Accounts And Allowances

Money earned by a child in foster care (including gifts and allowances) is a child's personal property. If a child has over \$200, help the child establish a personal bank account. If a child's spending habits need to be limited, consider a savings account that requires both the child's and the resource family parent's signature for withdrawal. No member of a resource family may borrow or spend money acquired by the child in foster care. You may need to restrict the amount of spending money a child has access to if in the child's best interest. When a child receives a substantial amount of money from any source other than the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (such as earnings, gifts, etc.) report this to the placement worker.

Decisions about allowances depend upon the age and maturity of the child and how your family handles allowances. Amounts should depend upon a child's recreational activities, school needs, religious contributions, and personal grooming needs. The amount should conform to family and community patterns of providing allowances. Be sure the child understands how much the child is to receive and what expenses it is expected to cover. This money should be paid out of the regular monthly foster care payment.

School

Enrolling a child in school is generally the responsibility of the resource family in which the foster child is placed. Your placement worker will tell you what is known of the child's previous school experience including the child's strengths, special needs, or problem behaviors (truancy, fighting or special class placement). Your relationship with school should be like any other parent/school relationship. Attend all parent-teacher conferences concerning the child and keep the placement worker informed of the child's progress or problems in school. If you detect problems that require special help, tell your placement worker so you both can advocate with the school. Keep copies of report cards and progress reports and share with the placement worker or keep for the child's *Lifebook*.

As a resource family, you have the responsibility for the child's daily school activities and for consenting to routine activities regarding education matters. You have the authority and responsibility to register the child in school, consent to the child's participating in an elective course of study, school activities, one-day field trips, and organized sports (with placement worker obtaining parent's permission). You may sign report cards and permission slips for routine educational activities. However, birth parents must consent to class trips that will interfere with court ordered parental visits. OCS approval is required for any out-of-state trips and for trips where the child will be away from your home over 72 hours.

When a child requires an Individual Education Plan (IEP), the school district will designate a person to oversee the child's IEP. That person is usually the birth parent, but if the birth parent is unable, the school appoints a surrogate parent. The resource family may be asked to be a surrogate parent to oversee the child's IEP.

A child may be enrolled in a private or parochial school **only when**:

- The child's parents (if appropriate) and the child agrees to a private school.
- The school meets the standards of the Alaska Department of Education.
- No cost to OCS will be incurred.

If you want to consider a private school for the child in your care, discuss the matter with the child's placement worker.

When a child in custody is moved from one placement to another that requires enrollment in another school district, the OCS worker will ensure that enrollment for the child

in the new school is done and all paperwork transferred. You should work with the placement worker to update all documents.

Sex Education

Sex education is a normal part of parenting. Most sexual education is in response to children's questions. Questions should be answered as openly and honestly as possible, giving allowance for the child's age and previous experience. In some instances, schools will offer courses in sex education. You may sign the permission slip for a child to attend special classes or refer this item to OCS for agency approval. Issues of birth control should be discussed with the placement worker. Use of contraceptives is considered a voluntary medical procedure and requires the permission of the child's birth parents.

Sleep

Your home should provide a bed, crib or sleeping space appropriate for the age of the child in care. You can help a child get to sleep by having a regular time for bed and a consistent routine such as pajamas, snack, brushing teeth, a story, a goodnight kiss and then to bed. For many children, a nightlight, soft stuffed animal and an open door helps keep scary night things away.

Sleep problems are common in children in foster care. Some children may have sleep disorders or disruptions as a result of trauma or separation from parents. Notify your placement worker if you see chronic sleep difficulties.

Library Cards

Resource families are encouraged to assist their foster children in obtaining library cards. Libraries in Alaska are individually overseen by the local government and vary in their policies in allowing under age youth to obtain a card in their own name. Some may ask that resource families assume liability for any lost or damaged materials. However, the majority of libraries will, when fees are imposed, discuss with the family and the child their situation and may instead, have the child volunteer in the library to waive the fee. Also, based on the situation, the local library may decide to waive fees for foster children. It is important for the family and the child to discuss their situation with the librarian. In a recent study done with the libraries around the state, very few libraries actually imposed fees or charges when foster children were involved.

Social Activities

The resource family may give permission for the child to engage in routine social activities, such as spending time with friends and dating privileges. Use the same caution and discretion in these decisions as you would with your birth children. Some children may need stricter limits or more supervision. Resource families may sign permission slips for routine activities such as school trips, Scout events, or sports activities if the child's absence from the home is less than 72 hours, or inside a 50-mile radius.

Television/Videos-DVDs/Internet

Limit television and video/DVD/Internet viewing to no more than 4 hours a day. Choose programs carefully for younger children and help older children choose programs suitable for their age. Television, video games, videos, Internet and DVD's can be very stimulating to children. If you have children who are easily agitated or distractible, reduce the number of and monitor any television programs watched.

Transportation

Routine transportation of child in foster care is the responsibility of the resource family. This includes transportation to family visits, medical facilities, school events, social and sport activities, religious activities, shopping, and counseling appointments. A vehicle used for the transportation of children should be licensed in accordance with state and local law. Resource families must have current liability insurance in effect. When transporting children, use car seats or safety belts depending on the age of the child.

Use Of Child's Legal Name

For legal purposes and for the child's sense of identity, a child in foster care should be called by the child's own name. A foster child should not assume the name of the resource family. If a child asks about using your name, remind the child that even though the child's own family cannot care for the child right now, it is important to keep the family name. Resource families will use the child's real name and not give the child a different name.

Vacations

If a vacation is under 72 hours (such as a weekend trip), resource families are not required to notify the placement worker unless the vacation would interfere with a court appointed visitation. Then permission needs to be granted from the birth parent. Notify your placement worker if the vacation will take the child away from home for longer than 72 hours, outside a 50-mile radius, or if the vacation will take place out of state.



Don't forget the fun!

An important part of daily living includes having fun with your foster children and with all of your family members! Go to a park, take a walk, pick berries, read stories together, have a theme meal, go skating or sledding, play with a dog, teach a skill, tell a joke, try to make each other laugh, go fishing, bake cookies, play a board game, sing a song together, or listen to each other around the table. When we enjoy each other's company, we get along better and we have some good times in our "emotional bank" to help us through the difficult times.

Danger Signals

In the day to day care of a child, resource families are often the first to see signs that a child is having a difficult time or needs professional help. The resource families may be the first to suspect a child has experienced additional abuse or neglect. By intervening with children early, emergencies may be averted. Contact your placement worker if you see any of the following symptoms:

PHYSICAL SIGNS:

- compulsive overeating
- chronic loss of appetite
- excessive sleep, sleeplessness
- constant colds, stomach aches or other illnesses
- frequent accidents

EXTREME FEARFULNESS:

- frequently recurring severe nightmares
- fear of people
- extreme unrealistic fear of animals
- persistent fear of going to school

EXTREME WITHDRAWAL:

- refusing to be touched
- refusing to talk
- withdrawing to a room or corner by self
- no eye contact

EXTREME CRUELTY TO ANIMALS OR CHILDREN:

- wanting to hurt others
- killing small animals or attempting to torture them

SELF DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIORS:

- injuring self
- pulling out her own hair, leaving bald spots
- banging head against walls or other objects

OTHER DANGER SIGNALS:

- setting fires
- running away
- sexual acting out
- suicide attempts or threat of suicide
- drug or alcohol abuse
- stealing
- depression

4. Emergencies and Changes in Your Home

What To Do In An Emergency ☆ After Hours Emergencies ☆ Your Emergency Contact ☆ Other Emergency Situations ☆ Serious Illness ☆ Criminal Activity ☆ Runaways ☆ Pregnancy Of Foster Child ☆ Death Of A Foster Child ☆ Changes In Your Foster Home ☆ Notifying OCS About Changes ☆ Short Term Absence Of Foster Child Or Parent ☆ When You Move

What To Do In An Emergency...

When you contact OCS in an emergency, identify yourself as a resource family member and tell the receptionist or answering service that you have an emergency and you need to speak to the placement worker or a supervisor. If you are located in a city where OCS uses an answering service for after-hours calls, tell the answering service that you have an emergency and need to have contact with OCS staff as soon as possible.

Even though the child is entrusted to your care, OCS retains ultimate responsibility for the safety, care and welfare of all children placed in foster care by the agency. For this reason, you must notify the placement worker about all incidents that affect the well being of the child. In smaller OCS offices, you can share the information with any OCS staff. In larger offices, you need to know whether to report to your placement worker (the OCS worker working with the child) or your licensing worker. The following list defines some, but not all, of the situations that are considered emergencies and to whom you should report. Always contact the office for any questions about what constitutes an emergency.

Contact the child's placement worker *immediately* regarding:

- death of a child in care
- attempted or threatened suicide by a child in care
- life threatening illness, hospitalization, or emergency surgery of a child in care
- suspected runaway or unapproved absence of a child of 10 hours or more
- any attempt by a parent or other individual to remove the child from your home without your permission

Contact your licensing worker *immediately* regarding:

- the death of a child
- serious injury or illness of child requiring medical attention outside of your home
- fire, flood, or other disaster to your home

Contact the child's placement worker *on first working day* (Monday through Friday) regarding:

- pregnancy of a child in care
- severe distress or depression of a child in care (seek immediate medical help if required for the safety of the child)
- violation of conditions of probation
- allegations of criminal conduct by a child in care

After Hours Emergencies

Each OCS office has its own procedure for dealing with emergencies that happen after office hours or on weekends. Ask your placement worker what the procedure is for your area. If you are in a serious situation and you cannot reach OCS, contact your local law enforcement agency. Contact your placement worker at the beginning of the following business day.

Your Emergency Contact

When you are licensed as a resource family, you are asked to designate an adult who will be available to help in case of sickness, accident, or other emergency absences. This emergency contact person is also the person you plan to use during planned absences of more than 72 hours. If your emergency contact changes, you must notify your licensing worker.

Other Emergency Situations

Serious Illness

In The Resource Family: If an accident or illness of someone in your family is serious, the placement worker can help you decide whether the foster children in your care should be moved (temporarily or permanently).

In The Foster Child: Resource families can only authorize surgery or other major medical care in an emergency when the medical problem is life threatening or would result in permanent injury. Either OCS or the birth parents (depending on the child's legal status) must give authorization for elective medical care (for non life-threatening illness or injury).

Criminal Activity

If your foster child is involved in criminal activity, you should request assistance from the local law enforcement agency and the placement worker immediately or as soon as possible. If your foster child is violent, threatening, on drugs or inebriated, contact the local law enforcement agency for assistance. Notify the placement worker or probation officer as soon as you can, but no later than the beginning of the next business day.

Runaways

If a child is missing, is a runaway or is gone for more than 10 hours without approval, report this to the placement worker as soon as you suspect the child has run away. If a child runs away during the weekend when the placement worker is not available, report to the local law enforcement agency. If you have an idea where the child might have gone, please tell your placement worker and law enforcement agency. When the child returns home, notify your placement worker and law enforcement agency as soon as possible.

Pregnancy Of Foster Child

If you suspect a child in your care might be pregnant, the placement worker should be notified on the first working day after you are aware of this situation. The placement worker is responsible for helping pregnant teens in OCS custody obtain proper prenatal care and counseling. This includes helping them explore all the options available to them during and after their pregnancy (including preparation for parenting or relinquishing the child). The worker may also make referrals for other available services. The child will probably remain in your care if your family is willing to adjust to the needed changes in the treatment plan.

Death Of A Foster Child

It is a very rare occasion that a child dies in foster care. It is a traumatic event for the birth family, the resource family and the placement worker. If a child dies while in your care (including if the child dies in the hospital), contact the OCS office immediately. Unless the child dies in a hospital, you must also contact the local law enforcement authority. Suicide by a child must be handled in the same manner. Whenever a child in OCS custody dies, the death is usually investigated by the State Child Fatality Review Team, unless the child's death resulted from a natural disease process, was medically expected and the child was under supervised medical care during the 24 hours before the death. Your local law enforcement agency may become involved to determine the facts and would need to ask questions of all persons, including resource family parents, who had knowledge of the circumstances of the child's death. An autopsy may be required.

A death is always a difficult event for all who are affected. As a resource family, you have no legal responsibility in relation to funeral expenses. You should be notified of the time and place of the services. Be aware that some parents may react to the loss of the child by becoming very hostile to agency personnel and resource families because of their feelings of failure, anger and grief. You should contact your placement worker if this situation occurs. Also talk to your placement worker about resources to help you and your family with your feelings of grief and sadness. Resource families often become attached to the children in their care, and it is important that you get a chance to talk about your feelings.

Unless parental rights have been terminated, the birth parents retain the right to plan the burial service for their child. The placement worker will advise them and assist them in planning an appropriate service. This would include making them aware of the resource family's interest in attending or participating in the service. If parental rights have been terminated, or if parents cannot be located or are deceased, the agency will assume the responsibility of planning services and may request your involvement.

The placement worker's responsibility is to inform the appropriate persons of the death and to initiate plans for the burial service and procedures. Depending upon the ability and resources of the child's birth family or guardian, the Office of Children's Services will assure that financial arrangements are made for burial arrangements.

Changes In Your Foster Home

When there is a major change in your home, *don't forget to tell OCS!* The change may affect your license or your ability to care for the child in your home. Some changes need prior approval, so think ahead. The requirements of when to notify OCS of changes or absences in your home follow in the list below. However, if you are uncertain whether a particular change not listed below requires reporting, discuss the change with your licensing worker who can assist you.

Notify your OCS licensing worker no later than *30 days* before the following changes:

- change in resource family in the home (marriage, divorce or death)
- change in name of a resource family home or change in name of person operating the home
- when wanting to change the designation on the license of the sex or age of the children to be served
- when wanting to delete or add a specialization
- addition of an individual 16 years of age or older to household for 45 days or more
- a change in the household (births, adoptions, etc.)
- when moving to a new location

Notify your licensing worker *within the time frame* given below in the following situations:

- change of mailing address (14 days before date of change)
- a resource family member or other household member is convicted or indicted of a serious crime (within 24 hours of knowing about the conviction or indictment)
- when wanting to relinquish a license (20 days notice)
- when wanting to change the number of children in care (20 days)

Short Term Absences Of Resource Family Or Child From Home

If you or your foster children are away from your home for any length of time, some rules apply. You need to get approval or need to notify the child's placement worker in the following cases:

- If children are to be absent from the home for more than 72 hours
- If you plan to take the child on a trip inside the state for more than 72 hours
- If you plan to take the child outside the state (you must request approval 14 days in advance.)
- If you plan to leave the child with an adult who is not listed on your Plan of Care for more than 72 hours, you need to revise the plan of supervision with your licensing worker.

When You Move

When You Move Within Your Community

If the planned move is local, notify your licensing worker as soon as possible so a home visit can be scheduled. Your licensing worker must be sure that your new residence also meets basic fire and health standards, and provides enough room for the foster child. A community care license is not transferable to a new address and a valid license is necessary for reimbursement. Once it has been determined that the new home meets the standards, a revised license and identification card showing your new address will be issued.

When You Move To Another Part Of The State

If the planned move is to another part of the state, the OCS worker will be involved in any decision for a foster child to move with you. If it is decided that the foster child will move with you, you will be required to contact the OCS office in the area to which you are moving to have them review the adequacy of your new residence and issue a new license. In most cases, a OCS placement worker from the office in your new location will be assigned to provide supervision for your foster child's case. The new placement worker will visit your home to get to know you and the foster child. The foster home reimbursement rate may also change as it differs from one area of Alaska to another. (See Financial section).

When You Move Out Of State

While each case is considered individually, the OCS generally does not approve such moves for a foster child if the plan is to reunite the child's family. In the event of approval for a foster child to move out of state with you, Alaska and the receiving state or county would enter into a formal agreement in which Alaska would retain custody of the child and responsibility for financial support. This is done through the Interstate Compact on Placement of Children (ICPC). The receiving state would provide licensing and placement services to the foster child and would send regular reports to the OCS worker in Alaska. The provider is allowed 30 days for vacation and 30 days to relocate. After the 60 day period, the State of Alaska will require a license in the new state to allow them to issue reimbursement.

The reimbursement will continue to be paid by Alaska only for 60 days or until new license is received. The rate in the receiving state will be adjusted according to the rate paid by the receiving state.

5. Financial Matters

The Reimbursement System ☆ Standard Rates ☆ Emergency Shelter Rates ☆ Augmented Rates ☆ Difficulty of Care ☆ Other Situations That May Apply ☆ Runaways ☆ Stand-By Homes ☆ One-Time Costs ☆ Damages And Loss ☆ Other Financial Considerations ☆ Income Tax ☆ Liability Insurance ☆ Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend ☆ Child Support Enforcement ☆ How The Reimbursement System Operates ☆ Instructions For Completing The A & I Form

The Reimbursement System

Reimbursement rates are established yearly by the Department of Health and Social Services. Reimbursement rates include *base/standard rates*, *emergency shelter rates*, and *augmented rates*.

Reimbursements are financial benefits to offset the costs associated with caring for a child so that the cost of care does not burden the resource family. The reimbursements are not intended to be a wage or salary to the resource family. Reimbursements are intended to offset costs you have already incurred, which means you submit your billing for the days for which you have already provided care for in the previous month. Your family should have a stable income other than the reimbursement and not depend on reimbursements to pay rent or time-sensitive necessities.

Base/Standard Rates

Standard rates for foster home care include reimbursement for the following:

- Food, including meals and snacks.
- Clothing replacement as needed by child.
- Shelter, including utilities and use of household furnishings and equipment.
- Personal and grooming items for the foster child, such as toothbrushes, diapers, haircuts, and other essentials.
- School supplies and regular school activities.
- Games, toys, books, and equipment costing less than \$100 per item appropriate to the ages of children in care in sufficient quantity to promote normal growth and development.
- General recreation such as picnics, community sports and movies.
- Usual transportation expenses on behalf of the foster child (including the purchase of bus passes and reasonable local travel to the child's primary home for visitation). This includes transportation to treatment, medical and after school activities visits.
- Allowance for the foster child appropriate to the child's age.
- Baby-sitting and child care (except as provided in 7 AAC 53.050 (b) (5)).

Reimbursement rates vary by community because of geographic differences in the cost of living. Check with your local office for current rates.

Emergency Shelter Rates

Emergency shelter rates are paid to a licensed resource family with a specialization for emergency shelter care. The emergency shelter rate applies when children are placed in a home with less than 24 hours notice. Emergency shelter rates for a child may be paid for a maximum of 10 days for any one placement. Emergency shelter rates are 120% of the standard rate. If the child continues to stay in your home for more than ten days, the reimbursement rate then would revert to standard reimbursement level.

Augmented rates

Increased rates may be paid for children placed by the OCS if the level of care a child requires has been assessed and determined by the OCS to exceed the basic (standard) level of care. When the standard rate is augmented, an extra amount is added to the daily rate for a certain period of time. *This is not the same as special needs requests for one-time or short time expenditures.* The assessment needed to document augmented/difficulty of care is completed by the OCS worker. Augmented rates or ongoing costs should be approved at the time of placement on the Foster Care Plan and Agreement. Re-determination must be made every six months or when the child changes placement.

Augmented rates for the following situations may be approved. Each request for augmented rates is reviewed on a case-by-case basis by OCS and based on available funding. For more specific information, contact your local placement worker.

- **Specialized** (requiring more intensive care and supervision from the resource family to deal with the child's identified specific issue) or **structured** (children with chronic and severe problems that require one parent in the home 24 hours a day, daily; these resource family members are additionally trained to provide more intensive services to the foster child). The following situations may also determine eligibility for augmented/difficulty of care rates.
- **Teen Parent/Baby:** If a teen parent and baby are placed in the same foster home, augmentation may be paid for either the parent or the baby, depending on the status of custody. Augmentation may also be paid for a teen parent placed in his or her own biological or legal home. Please contact the placement worker for further information.
- **Ongoing Direct Costs** For ongoing extra costs that may be incurred in caring for children who have special needs, eligibility under Medicaid, the Crippled Children's Program or other appropriate resources will be determined before the augmented rates are requested. If the extra costs are covered by another program, such as Medicaid, augmented rates cannot be paid.
- **Medically Fragile Children:** Augmented rates may be approved for children on waiver or waiver wait lists through the Division of Behavioral Health. These requests for augmented rates are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. All other resources should be researched for eligibility for **other** assistance that may be available. The OCS placement and eligibility workers will pursue application for this resource.

Please contact your placement worker for any additional information regarding augmented rates and training.

Other Situations That May Apply...

Runaways

If a child is missing, is a runaway or is gone for more than 10 hours without approval, foster care rates may continue for a maximum of five days if authorized by the worker. If the intent is to return the child to the resource family after the AWOL, the worker may authorize keeping the bed open up to five days. Resource families may not claim these days unless the worker authorizes it. The five-day payment may be made whether or not the child returns as long as the resource family immediately notifies the placement worker when a child in care is absent without approval for 10 hours or more. If the child does not return within the five-day period, that space becomes available on the sixth day unless other arrangements are made with the OCS worker. If OCS determines within the first five days that the child will not be returned to your home, payment will continue through the date of the determination, not the full five days.

Stand-by Homes/Emergency Receiving Homes

In some communities in Alaska, and as funding allows, OCS contracts with emergency stand-by homes to act as continual emergency nighttime shelters for children coming into care who do not yet have a placement. These homes have strict rules regarding availability of beds and need to be available during evening hours and on weekends. These homes receive a stipend for keeping a certain number of beds on hold for emergency placement and also receive a reimbursement for the number of days children are actually placed in their home. The reimbursement is not considered income and therefore is not taxable. However, the stipend for keeping a certain number of beds open is subject to taxation, as under IRS rules this is countable income. Please see IRS Publication 17, chapter 3, "Dependents" for more information.

One-time Costs

One-time items are goods or services that are not included in the reimbursement because they are one time or short term costs that exceed \$100. You may request one-time funds for a foster child when there are no other resources for payment. Make a request in writing to your placement worker. You should receive written approval of reimbursement for the expenditure prior to purchasing the goods or service. For one-time costs, you need to go through your placement worker who will evaluate the request and if in agreement, submit a Request for Funds form through the appropriate channels.

Examples of items that may be, but are not required to be, approved one time costs include:

- Special cribs, beds, mattresses, prosthetic devices, orthopedic shoes or appliances and aids for the handicapped. (Check with the Division of Behavioral Health for any assistance they may be able to offer).
- Special event costs such as graduation costs if the child is placed less than 90 days before the event.

Independent Living Funds

For youth in out-of-home care who are 14 years or older, limited federal funds are available to provide for educational and vocational preparation costs. The child's social worker applies for these funds through a special funds request. It is the resource family's responsibility to prepare a youth 16 or older for independent living, using funds that may be available through OCS. Resource families can get 1.0 training hour credit by assisting their foster child in completing the Ansell-Casey assessment. Alaska Center for Resource Families

can provide information on independent living education materials.

Damages And Loss

Costs related to modest damages and losses are normal in the care of children and are included in the standard rate. However, the OCS will reimburse a resource family for damages and loss up to \$5000 under certain circumstances. These may include financial losses resulting from physical injury inflicted by a foster child to a member of the resource family household or to property of the household not covered by other insurance policies. These losses must be documented by the resource family (including filing a report with law enforcement agency as required by the OCS) and corroborated by the OCS. The following circumstances must exist:

1. The damage or loss is a result of a deliberate act with malicious intent or with gross negligence on the part of the child.
2. The resource family provided adequate supervision and exercised appropriate precautions considering the child's maturity and behavioral history.
3. Damage or loss claimed does not include rental or other payment for lost time or lost use of the damaged or lost items.
4. The damage or loss exceeds \$100 for a single event or \$150 cumulative.

You must submit a completed Loss Report within 72 hours from the time of the loss or physical injury. You may obtain this report form from your local or regional office. A resource family home is expected to own basic home insurance, if purchasing their home. Renter's may be able to purchase renter's insurance. The \$5000 is intended to cover the deductible in case of fire or other major damage if all the above conditions are met.

Other Financial Considerations...

Income Tax Of The Resource Family

The payment you receive for providing regular foster care is considered reimbursement for expenses incurred in providing care for the children in your home. Special increased payments for children requiring extra care are usually also considered as reimbursement. As such, reimbursements are not considered countable income by IRS. However, if your home is a contracted stand-by emergency home that receives a stipend to keep beds available, the stipend is considered taxable income. Reimbursement you receive for the actual children who stay in your home is not taxable. Contact your nearest Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for more information on what portions, if any, of the reimbursement must be reported as income when you file your federal income tax return. Refer to **IRS Publication 17** and the section for Dependents in Chapter 3.

Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend Check

The OCS placement worker is responsible for applying for the foster child's Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend Check for every year the child is in care. The money will be held in trust for the child until the child emancipates from foster care or until custody is returned to the birth parents or to a permanent placement where the child is not in OCS custody.

Child Support Enforcement

When a child comes into care of the state, whether through public assistance or foster care, OCS is required to contact the State of Alaska Child Support Enforcement Division. Child support will open a file and contact the birth parents for child support contributing to the care of a child. If child support is paid by the parents of a child in foster care, the money goes to the state to help cover the costs during the time the child is in out-of-home care.

6. Medical Care

Getting Medical Care For A Child ☆ Access To Medical Information ☆ Emergency Shelter Care Health Review ☆ Consent For Emergency And Routine Medical Care ☆ Parental Consent ☆ Medicaid Eligibility ☆ Indian Health Service ☆ Ongoing Medical Care ☆ Immunizations And Check Ups ☆ Keeping Medical Records ☆ Medications ☆ HIV/AIDS Testing ☆ Medical Care While Traveling

Getting Medical Care For A Child...

Emergency Shelter Care Health Review

When a child is placed with you under emergency conditions, you are asked to complete the **Emergency Shelter Care Health Review**. This is a form in the placement packet that assists you in determining the immediate health condition of the child. The review asks you to make note of the child's general appearance including any visible signs of injury such as bruises, scratches or cuts. The resource family should ask about any pain or discomfort and make note of the answer. Finally, the Health Review asks the resource family to ask the child if the child is taking medication, undergoing special medical treatment or has an illness that puts others at risk. These questions help the resource family determine immediate health needs. Report any finding of concern to your placement worker.

Access to Medical Information

As a resource family, you have the right, within the parameter of statutory confidentiality mandates, to any known medical information or health history that OCS may have at the time of placement or during the child's stay with you. Resource families have the right to limited communication with the child's therapist. The Consent for Emergency/Routine Medical Care form allows for some discussion with physicians about the child's health. Discussion with educators is guided by the confidentiality rules governing the schools. This includes reports prepared by or for the department, including reports compiled before the child was placed with you. It is both federal and state law that, as resource families, you are provided with health and education information. You, in turn, are required to maintain and update these records while the child is with you and return all records to the placement worker when the child leaves your home. Contact your placement worker if you are missing information.

Consent For Emergency And Routine Medical Care

When a child is placed with you, you should receive a *Consent For Emergency And Routine Medical Care* form. If you do not receive one, *ask for it*. Resource families are responsible to make sure children get regular medical care (immunizations, dental and medical exams). Resource families need the Consent Form to obtain routine and emergency care for children in care. Do not provide written consent for any medical examination or treatment of a child unless you have been given a written delegation of authority through the *Consent for Emergency and Routine Medical Care*.

As a resource family, you are responsible to secure routine medical care for a child just as you would for your own children. Resource families are also responsible for getting emergency care for a child when necessary. The *Consent* form allows you to secure emergency

care when the medical problem is life threatening or would result in permanent injury. If a child needs emergency care or hospitalization, contact OCS as soon as possible.

When Parental Consent Is Needed

If a major medical procedure (including major dental treatment) is required that is not an emergency, consent must be obtained from the birth parent. Parents retain certain “residual parental rights even when their children have been removed from their home, until parental rights have been either voluntarily relinquished or legally terminated. If parental rights have been terminated, OCS must then consent to the medical/dental procedure.

Drugs prescribed for mental illness or behavioral problems are called psychotropic drugs. Psychotropic drugs are considered *non-emergency major medical care* and must have the consent of birth parents, or OCS approval if parental rights have been terminated. Birth control is also considered non-emergency medication and needs consent of the birth parent.

Medicaid Eligibility

Most children who enter foster care are eligible for Medicaid. Medicaid covers the cost of the foster child’s medical care, dental care, pharmaceutical services and any health needs. In order for a child to receive Medicaid coverage, the child’s placement worker submits an application to OCS’s regional Eligibility Technician who makes an eligibility determination for the child. Upon approval, Medicaid coupons are then mailed to the address on the form. These coupons can be taken to the medical provider (doctor, pharmacy or hospital) for payment at the time of the child’s appointment. If the child already has a medical or dental care provider, it should be noted on the *Consent Form*. For continuity of medical care, you should try to use the child’s health care provider. You should check with the health care provider to be sure that the provider accepts Medicaid coupons. Should you have trouble locating a health care professional in your area who accepts Medicaid, contact the OCS office in your area or a public health center.

If you do not get your coupons and a child needs care...

- Contact your placement worker for emergency coupons. If there are no coupons, get a letter from the placement worker stating that the coupons have been applied for.
- Contact the OCS eligibility technician or placement worker and explain your situation.
- Some Medicaid providers will provide service and ask you to bring in the coupons when they arrive.

If a child is not Medicaid eligible, payment for medical care may be handled in one of several ways. If a child has no resources for medical care, OCS is financially responsible for these services. However, prior authorization from OCS is required. Before any discretionary medical or dental treatment is provided, it must be pre-authorized by OCS or DJJ. Medicaid criteria will be used by OCS to determine if a procedure or treatment is routine regardless of the child’s eligibility for Medicaid.

Indian Health Service Health Coverage

Alaska Native/American Indian children must be enrolled or a descendent of an enrolled tribal member with a federally recognized Tribe in order to receive health benefits from the Indian Health Service (IHS). Resource families should use the IHS clinic in their community for eligible foster children.

Ongoing Medical Care for A Child...

Immunizations And Check Ups Through The Healthy Kids Program

Every child in foster care needs to be immunized according to the schedule outlined in E.P.S.D.T. (*Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment*) Program, also known as the "Healthy Kids" Program. E.P.S.D.T. is a program funded through Medicaid that provides medical assistance to children in foster care. When a child is placed with you, try to determine within the first month of care whether the child's immunizations are current. The immunization record may be attached to the medical consent form or the consent form may indicate the location of the child's immunization record. Ask the child's placement worker for assistance if the record is missing or check with the child's health provider. If a child is not up-to-date with immunizations, make an appointment with a doctor or health care provider.

Children also need regular check ups and health care according to the E.P.S.D.T. schedule. This schedule is available through any health clinic or medical provider. Regular screenings are offered at public health centers and these screenings can also help detect special needs and provide referrals.

Try to find out when the child last saw a health care provider. This information may be hard to get because it may not be known at the time of placement. Always ask for it, however, and keep records of what you were able to find out and what information was not available to you. If you could not get any information, document attempts you made to get it.

Schedule a physical exam for the child coming into your care within 30 days of placement, unless the child had an exam within the last year. For a child three and younger, the exam should have been within three months of the child's placement in your home. Children over three years old need a dental exam once a year. Screenings, exams and immunizations are part of the E.P.S.D.T. program and are available through community public health centers and clinics.

Research has shown children in foster care are often behind the norms in health, so your role in helping a child get immunizations and check ups is important!

Keeping Medical Records

Keep all records of care or treatment your foster child receives. These records will go with the child when the child leaves your home. If no documentation was provided by the health care provider, keep a log of the care the child receives.

If a child is seriously injured such as sustaining a black eye or deep cut or requires medical care for an emergency, you should notify your placement worker. Notify your licensing worker as well regarding any serious injury or illness requiring attention by a health provider. You may file an incident report (Form D084-LIC-08) with OCS if you wish.

Medications

A resource family may administer prescription medicine and special medical procedures to a child only as authorized by a doctor or legally authorized health provider. If a child is taking prescription medicine, keep the medication in its original container. This container should have a label showing the date filled, the expiration date, instructions, and the physician's or health provider's name. Keep all written records regarding the medication.

If treatment is completed and medication is left over, **throw it away!** *Do not save the medicine used with one child to treat another, even if you think the child has the same illness!* Unused medications spell trouble in a house with children. Keep all medications out of the reach of children. For common illness or injury, a resource family can use over-the-counter drugs. Use these medications only according to directions unless a health provider indicates otherwise. If you receive different directions from your health provider, get those instructions in writing.

If medication for behavioral or mental problems (such as drugs for depression) is prescribed, seek approval from the placement worker before filling the prescription and administering to the child. Drugs prescribed for behavior or mental health conditions are usually considered *non-emergency major medical care* and must have the consent of birth parents or OCS approval if parental rights have been terminated.

HIV/AIDS Testing

A resource family is not allowed to have a child tested for HIV/AIDS infection without prior approval by the placement worker.

Medical Care While Traveling

When you are planning to travel with a child in care, remember to take the **Consent For Emergency And Routine Medical Care** and the child's Medicaid coupons with you. In the event of an emergency that requires medical treatment and/or hospitalization, you must have proof that the child has medical coverage. Should the physician or the hospital refuse to accept Medicaid, OCS will reimburse you for the amount of the bill. You will need a receipt for services rendered.

7. Health and Safety

Baby Walkers ☆ Car Seats, Seats Belt ☆ Childproofing ☆ Fire Safety and Fire Drills ☆ First Aid ☆ Guns and Firearms ☆ Pets and Animals ☆ Participating in Risk Activities ☆ Sleeping Babies ☆ Supervision of Children ☆ Smoking and Second Hand Smoke ☆ Universal Precautions ☆ Water Safety

Baby Walkers

Baby walkers are not allowed in foster care. Baby walkers have a high accident rate and research suggests that walkers and other restraining devices may also cause delays in a child's development.

Car Seats, Seat Belts

In Alaska, it is a primary offense to allow children under the age of 16 to travel without an appropriate restraint device or seat belt. Children under four years of age and under 40 pounds must be properly secured in a federally approved child safety seat. Children under one year and under 20 pounds must ride rear facing, in either an infant or convertible seat, whichever is more appropriate.

Children over one year and over 20 pounds may ride forward facing, but only in a convertible seat within weight limits. Children over four must be secured in an approved child safety seat or safety belt, whichever is appropriate for the particular child. Children over forty pounds who no longer fit in a convertible seat may be moved to a booster seat, which must be used with a lap and shoulder belt. It is recommended that children be rear facing for as long as possible in a convertible seat. The use of a five-point harness is also recommended if at all possible. Do not place a young child in the front seat of a car if there is an airbag, even if the child is in a car seat. Airbags have been associated with a high rate of injury to children when children are seated in the front seat. Children should never be allowed to ride in the back of a truck.

Childproofing

Making your house safe for children is called "childproofing." The regulations require childproofing as follows:

- For children under 5 years, install childproof cover caps in electrical outlets not in use that are accessible to children.
- Keep hot water temperature at no more than 120 degrees. You may need to install a control if your hot water heater does not have one. Hot water tanks are generally set to this temperature at the factory. Remember, burns are some of the most common injuries to children.
- All cleaners, medicines, matches, lighters and harmful substances need to be stored according to the age and developmental abilities of the children in your care. Childproof locks on cabinets are advised as well. Do not keep your cleaners underneath the sink. Keeping medicines out of reach of children is required and it is advised that these be locked as well. Lock up and put out of reach all sharp tools such as knives, utensils, scissors, screwdrivers, nails, etc.

- If you have babies or toddlers, use good hygiene when diapering. Wash your hands and the child's hands frequently. Dispose of diapers in containers with lids or have a system for cleaning and sanitizing cloth diapers. Clean and sanitize the diaper-changing surface frequently.
- If two or more young children are being cared for, label bottles and pacifiers. Do not let children share used pacifiers or bottles. When reusing bottles, clean and disinfect bottles either in a dishwasher or by boiling them for five minutes before use.

Fire Safety and Fire Drills

Resource families must meet basic fire safety standards. A licensing worker will inspect your home to determine if these standards have been met. Resource family homes need to have a plan for getting children out of the house during a fire. ***Fire moves fast!*** Think ahead about what you would do in a fire and practice your plan with the children.

1. Practice fire drills once a month unless there is bad weather. If the children in care are 12 years or older and have practiced the fire drill at least three times in your home, fire drills can be practiced once every three months. Agree on a meeting place outside the house. If you care for a child younger than 30 months old or with special needs (such as deafness or in a wheelchair or crib bound), you need to specify a way to evacuate that child in your fire plan and practice your plan.
2. Document your fire drills. Regulations require that your fire escape plan can evacuate your home in less than 150 seconds. Include the date, time, participants and evacuation time.
3. A working smoke detector and a fully charged fire extinguisher (2A:10BC) are required on each level of the house. Although carbon monoxide detectors are not required by regulation, they are advised for the safety of all household members.
4. Check your home for safety. Store flammable or combustible liquids in containers with tight fitting lids and out of the reach of children. Be careful with heating appliances. Do not locate heating appliances in exit ways, hallways, and sleeping areas (unless your home does not have separate sleeping rooms).

For group homes that care for five or more children, additional fire safety precautions (such as sprinkler systems) may be required. The home needs to comply with the fire safety requirements of the local government or state fire marshal's office. Please check with your licensing/placement worker for group home requirements.

Especially in Alaska, it is important to check your escape windows often to assure that they are not frozen shut during winter months. If your home uses a woodstove, be sure it is properly installed and used. Clean the stack frequently. Take special precautions to supervise children around a woodstove and teach them safety rules to prevent injury.

First Aid

Current certification in First Aid and CPR (coronary pulmonary resuscitation) is not required of resource families in the state of Alaska, but it is strongly recommended that all families at least learn the basics of treating minor injuries. Your house should have a first aid kit or supplies for small injuries such as cuts, scratches, burns and scrapes. You should know what to do for a choking child or a child who is bleeding or is not breathing. This is especially important if you are caring for a child with medical complications. A simple first aid chart is available through OCS or through your local health clinic. If you are interested in first aid training, contact the Red Cross, licensing worker, placement worker, Alaska Center for Resource Families, school, emergency services or the health service or hospital in your community for referral to classes that may be offered.

Guns And Firearms

If you have guns in your home, you need to use and store your firearms in a responsible way in order to prevent injury to children in your care. The foster care regulations specify that firearms need to be stored *unloaded* and *reasonably inaccessible* to children. Ammunition is to be stored separately from the guns and in a place that children cannot access. You must keep guns and ammunition stored separately and locked.

You must have the permission of the placement worker before you allow a foster child to use a gun. A resource family shall request the child's placement worker to obtain advance permission from the birth parents to handle a firearm. If an older foster child is allowed to handle a gun, the resource family must submit a firearm safety plan (via the foster care plan) to the licensing worker for approval before the foster child is allowed to handle any firearm. You need to put in writing how you are going to teach the child how to use the gun safely. If your community has a gun safety course it is highly advised that the age appropriate foster child complete the gun safety course.

Pets And Animals

Pets can be a therapeutic experience for most children in care. Good sense should guide the resource family in keeping pets a safe experience as well. Resource families should take care to keep cages and pets clean and free of disease. Change water daily. Make it a habit, and teach children, to wash hands after handling pets. If you have pets in your home, be sure the child in your care is not allergic to animals. If children are unfamiliar or frightened by a pet, introduce them gradually and teach children proper pet handling and care.

Resource family homes should avoid dangerous animals such as dogs with a history of biting, lunging or who are wolf hybrids with a high percentage of wild heritage (over 30%), or wild animals such as skunks, monkeys, and wild rodents. Great care should be taken with turtles, baby ducks, baby chicks, parrots and parakeets since these animals are particularly prone to carry such diseases as psittacosis and salmonella. Please check with your licensing and placement workers regarding questionable pets.

Participating In High Risk Activities

Highrisk activities and hazards are prohibited by licensing regulations, unless a variance is obtained. Example of high risk activities include: a child age eight or younger riding an all terrain vehicle or snowmobile; or a child of any age riding an all terrain vehicle with only three wheels; boating with out a personal flotation device or in dangerous water conditions; or participating in an airborne activity such as hang gliding; or using motorized scooters.

Participation in organized and supervised sports that may be considered risky or other potentially risky activities that are usual in the community in which the child resides is normal and appropriate for a child in care. For example, ice fishing would be usual in some communities, but not others. A young child should not be exposed to a risky activity except under close supervision or until the child is developmentally ready.

If an older child wants to participate in an activity of moderate risk such as participation in a contact sport or activities not common to your community, you must get written permission from the child's placement worker. You should also request the child's placement worker obtain advance permission from the child's birth parent.

Sleeping Babies

Recent studies show a correlation between babies sleeping on their tummies and a higher rate of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.) Pediatricians now advise parents to place sleeping babies on their backs or their sides to minimize the risk of SIDS. Check on sleeping

babies regularly. Keep the crib free of small objects, cords, stuffed toys with small parts that can be bitten or chewed off, and large, soft pillows. All of these may present a safety hazard to infants. No water beds!

Supervision Of Children

You should supervise the children in your home according to their age and needs. If your foster child has special needs or requires individualized care, you may need to limit the number of children in your home in order to provide an adequate level of care and supervision. If a child is emotionally delayed, immature or aggressive, you may need to provide close supervision regardless of the child's age. Set clear limits about places to go and when to be home. Ask children to call you when they arrive or leave events and avoid leaving children unsupervised for long periods of time. This may be stricter supervision than you are used to giving to your birth children. Your supervision plan needs to include a designated adult who is available to help in case of sickness, accident, or other emergencies. Notify your licensing worker if your emergency caregiver changes.

Audio monitoring devices may also be suggested for a child with extraordinary medical needs or for a newborn child.

Smoking And Second Hand Smoke

Smoking is prohibited in a room where there are foster children under 30 months. This means if you have infants and toddlers in care, you need to smoke in a different room than the children. It is never a good idea to smoke in the same room as children of any age. However, regulations allow smoking in the presence of children older than 2 1/2 years if you submit a plan describing how you will protect children from second hand smoke in your foster home and the plan is approved.

Universal Precautions

Foster children often come into care with little known about their medical history. To keep foster children and families safe from contagious diseases, the regulations advise all resource family homes to follow Universal Precautions to reduce risk against the spread of Hepatitis B, giardia, HIV, and other infectious diseases. Universal Precautions reduce the risk of diseases passed through bodily fluids. Bodily fluids include blood, saliva, feces, vomit, and semen. Everyone in your house should follow these health practices including respite workers and baby-sitters.

Parents and children alike should wash their hands before handling, preparing or eating food, setting the table or handling dishes or silverware. Always wash hands with water and soap after using the toilet, assisting a child in using the toilet, or changing diapers. Teach children to wash their hands after using the toilet. Other Universal Precautions specific to preventing the passing of hepatitis and HIV include the following:

- 1. Wear disposable latex gloves when you encounter blood or when you have open sores or cuts on your skin or hands and have contact with bodily fluids.*
- 2. When changing a diaper, use disposable gloves if there is visible blood in the feces or if you have sores or cuts on your hands.*
- 3. Use disposable materials like paper towels to stop bleeding or when handling bodily fluids. Dispose of any tissues or paper towels in a sealed plastic bag placed in a covered container (such as in a plastic bag in a garbage can with a lid).*

4. *Clean up blood soiled surfaces and disinfect surfaces with a fresh solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.*

Water Safety

Drowning is a major cause of death in Alaska. If water activities, such as boating or swimming or fishing, are a regular part of your family life, make safety a priority. In Alaska, state law mandates that children under 13 years wear a Personal Flotation Device while boating. Always supervise children when around riverbanks or beaches and never let a child walk the shore or swim alone or unobserved. Teach children good water safety practices and review the safety rules each time you are around a body of water. Always check the weather forecast before a boating trip.

Children can also drown in the home. It only takes as little as an inch of water for a child to drown. Empty buckets and containers of water when not in use and drain water from sinks and bathtubs after use. Keep toilet lids down and never leave young children alone in the bathtub.

8. Positive Parenting

Being A Positive Parent ☆ Child Development ☆ What About Rules? ☆ What Are Positive Ways To Manage Behavior? ☆ What Is Not Allowed In Foster Care? ☆ Parenting Difficult Children ☆ When Nothing Works ☆ Taking Care Of Yourself

Being A Positive Parent To The Child In Your Care

As a resource family, you are responsible for guiding and protecting a child while the child is in your home. This means caring for the child's physical needs, and providing guidance and support for the child's emotional and social needs. Resource families should develop skills to help children grow up to be responsible and capable. As a resource family, you are expected to:

- Help the children in your care develop age appropriate patterns of behavior that foster constructive relationships and an increasing ability to deal with everyday life.
- Provide positive reinforcement, redirection, realistic expectations, and consistent limits with the children.
- Treat the foster children in your care the same way you treat your own children.
- Include the birth parent in the child's life.

Child Development

Many children who come into foster care have developmental delays. Delays can be either physical, emotional, social or a combination of these. If resource families do not actively promote a child's development, children could fall further behind *while in your home*. A resource family should provide structure and daily activities that encourage development in children.

A good resource family home provides an environment that will help a child grow and develop. This means providing opportunities for quiet and active play, indoor and outdoor play, and play with other children. Your home should have toys and materials appropriate to the child's age and developmental level. Talk to the child in your care often, even if the child is still a baby. Touching, rocking, singing, exchanging smiles, and looking into a child's eyes are all ways to stimulate development in a young child.

Do not routinely leave a child awake in a crib for more than 15 minutes without adult contact. Talk to the baby, pick him up, rub his back or tummy for few minutes, play with the baby, change the toys in the crib or put on some music. If a child regularly uses a playpen or restraining device, be sure the child has frequent periods of play outside of the device.

Look for delays! If you feel a baby or a young child is delayed in development, mention your concerns to the placement worker and to your health provider. Because you observe your foster children each day, you may be the first to detect delays or potential problems. The Infant Learning Program is a good resource for resource families throughout the state and can assess

development and provide activities for the resource family to share with a child to further development.

What About Rules?

Let each child in your care know the rules in your house soon after the child arrives so that the child will understand your expectations. Children in foster care may come from a home with very different rules than those in your home. Genuine communication with the child will greatly benefit your relationship, especially at times when you must take corrective measures.

When making rules, remember to:

1. Make the rule clear and repeat it often.
2. Rules can be simply stated: You may not hurt yourself, others or things. Better yet, state rules in the positive. That is, state your rules so the child will know clearly what you want. For example: *"In this house, we eat with our spoon and fork."* instead of *"Don't eat with your fingers!"*
3. Rules should be based upon what can be reasonably expected from the child's age and emotional development.
4. Be consistent in enforcing the rules.
5. Contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families for the positive parenting training classes.

What Are Positive Ways To Manage Behavior?

Besides establishing some simple rules for your home, plan other positive ways to parent the children in your care. Here are a few examples:

- **Model desired behavior:** Remember, children imitate the adults around them. Set an example by the way you act.
- **Good Communication:** Talk to children about their behavior. Give them specific information about what you expect. Give praise and let your children know how you feel when they do well. Remind them of rules and calmly talk about problems.
- **Practice! Practice! Practice!:** Don't just tell—show! Teach a child how to do a chore or complete a task by showing him how to do it. Role-play situations and have the child practice using words to deal with his feeling.
- **Childproofing:** Set up your house so that children are safe and potential problems are minimized.
- **Structure and Routines:** Children do best when they can predict what is going to happen. Have regular meal times, bedtimes, chores, and expectations about what happens after school. This gives children a sense of security and helps your home operate more smoothly.

- **Make a list or chart of what you want the child to do:** This is a good way to encourage self-care habits such as routines for getting up in the morning or going to bed at night. Providing stickers for young children or a point system to earn a special privilege for older children provides extra incentive for learning new behaviors.
- **Consequences:** Help children learn to take responsibility for what they do. Consequences teach children that they need to accept how their actions affect others. Natural consequences are great teachers. **FOR EXAMPLE:** *If you don't wear your mittens, you have cold hands by the time you get to school.* Logical consequences mean you use a result that is directly connected to the child's actions. **FOR EXAMPLE:** *If you do not take care of your bike or toys, you lose the privilege to play with them.* Pick consequences carefully. Remember — you need to live with it, too!
- **Call a time-out:** Time-outs help children (and parents) get back in control. Time-outs should give either parents or children a time to cool-off and calm down. Keep a time-out brief. It should be no longer than 10 minutes for young children because young children have a sense of time that is much longer than adults. Generally a time-out should last one minute for each year of the child's age. Come back together and talk about what happened and how to deal with it next time.
- **Supervision:** You may need to stay close to a child with particularly difficult behaviors. You may need to closely watch the child's behavior and offer firm support. Plan on spending lots of time with the children in your care. Children need to feel the support of the adults around them.

What Is Not Allowed In Foster Care?

The foster care regulations clearly state what types of discipline are not allowed in caring for a foster child. These restrictions are designed to keep the foster home a safe and positive place for children. When you agree to be a resource family, you are agreeing that you will follow these guidelines.

No spanking or corporal punishment may be used on a child in care. That means no hitting, slapping, pinching, hair pulling, hand slapping, ear pulling or other physical actions that cause pain or discomfort to a child. Failure to follow this law may result in criminal charges against a resource family. Resource families are not allowed to have romantic relationships with their foster children. Failure to follow this law will result in criminal charges against a resource family.

Additionally, a child in care may not be:

- (1) Removed from the other children for more than 10 minutes for a young child (*unless approved in the treatment plan for the child*);
- (2) disciplined in association with food or rest;
- (3) punished for bedwetting or actions in regard to toileting or toilet training;
- (4) subjected to discipline administered by another child;
- (5) deprived of family contacts, mail, clothing, medical care, therapeutic activities designated in the child's plan of care, or contact with the child's placement worker or legal representative;
- (6) subjected to verbal abuse, to derogatory remarks about the child or members of the child's family or to threats to expel the child from the foster home;
- (7) placed in a locked room;

- (8) physically restrained, except when necessary to protect a young child from accident, protect persons on the premises from physical injury, or protect property from serious damage and then only passive physical restraint may be used,
- (9) mechanically restrained, except for protection such as seat belts ; or
- (10) chemically restrained, except on the order of a physician.

Parenting Children With Difficult Behaviors

Some children in care have a pattern of very difficult behaviors. Some children in foster care are reacting to the separation and grief of being away from family and being in a strange place. Some children have a history of abuse and neglect and may be showing the impact of maltreatment. Some children are emotionally disturbed or suffering from mental health problems. Sometimes children have a physical condition such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) that may cause difficult behaviors. These conditions can cause a child's behavior to be very difficult and challenging to a resource family who may not have dealt with the behaviors before.

As a resource family, you are not alone. If you are caring for a child with a particularly difficult behavior, you should consult your placement worker about getting support in dealing with these behaviors. A therapist who works with your child is an excellent resource for helping you put together a program that helps the child learn control at home. Having a plan or a regular method you use with a child will help you consistently deal with problems. It will also help you *work with* a child instead of *punishing* the child for things that may be beyond the child's control or ability to learn due to their physical or mental conditions as well as help the child be successful.

When Nothing Works...

Get help! Sometimes you have tried *everything* and could use some help! Try a buddy system with another resource family to get a fresh view of the child's behavior. Contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families for help. The child's placement worker may also have insight into an issue. If the child is in therapy, the child's counselor may be helpful. Keep a log of the child's behavior or patterns to help plan a strategy to address problem areas. Other parents and resource families are great resources! Find resources in your community to assist you, such as support groups, parenting classes, workshops or help lines.



And most importantly, take care of yourself!

Being a resource family is very stressful, especially if you have a child with difficult behaviors. Take time for yourself, even if it is just a few minutes each day. Take breaks from your children. Learn to count to ten in stressful situations. *Only when you take care of yourself can you take care of the children in your home!*

9. A Child's Birth Family/ Relative Care

Family Centered Services ☆ Working With A Child's Birth Family ☆ Interactions With A Birth Parent ☆ Parental Consent ☆ Keeping Children Connected To Their Families ☆ The Child's Feelings ☆ Respecting A Child's Culture Or Ethnic Heritage ☆ Visitations ☆ Possible Problems In Visits ☆ Visits With Other Relatives and Sibling ☆ Lifebooks ☆ Relative Placements

When a child needs protection and is placed in out-of-home care, there are efforts to reunite the child with the child's birth family. If reunification is not possible, OCS will seek a permanent home for the child. As a result, resource families may find themselves having frequent contact with a child's birth family, most often in the form of visits. Regardless why a child is placed in care, the child's family remains important. A resource family is required to support a child's relationship with the birth family.

Working With A Child's Birth Family Interactions With A Birth Parent

Your level of contact with a birth parent will depend on you, the placement worker and the case plan. How you and the birth parent get along will be different in every situation. Sometimes, a birth parent may see a resource family as a threat. You are now "the parent" to the child. The birth parent may feel angry, ashamed or belittled in your presence. The birth parent may feel jealous if the child shows affection toward you. Some birth parents try to regain control through criticizing how you dress or feed the child. Some birth parents will complain to the placement worker about you or allege the child is being abused or neglected in your home. It is difficult not to take these things personally. However, it helps to remember that a birth parent needs a way to stay connected with the child. Caring about how a child is dressed or is fed is a strength. When possible and appropriate, try to find ways to involve a parent, such as bringing a snack to visits so the parent can feed the child or ask the parent's opinion about a situation. If the goal is to reunite families whenever possible, we should encourage a parent's attempts to care for the child.

Other birth parents may use you as a support or a confidante. No matter what your relationship is with a birth parent, your first responsibility is to support the case plan and care for the child. It is important not to take sides with the birth parent against the placement worker or allow visits outside of the visitation schedule established in the case plan. Remember as well that resource families are obligated to share important information affecting the child with the placement worker. Encourage the birth parent to share concerns and questions with the placement worker.

Your attitude and interaction with a birth parent is also very important to the child in your care. When children are placed in foster care, they are at great risk for thinking that their family is "no good" and that his parents are bad. The child often interprets this to mean that he, too, is "no good." If a resource family can communicate to the child an attitude of compassion, the child is more likely to avoid this trap. Neglectful and abusive parents were very likely mistreated as children and no one was there to help them. This is often part of their anger toward the agency and toward resource families. By being compassionate and having realistic expectations of birth parents, you will be more effective in constructively interacting with them and with talking with the child in your care.

Parental Consent

OCS must obtain the permission of the birth parents of the foster child for the following situations:

- Enlistment in the armed forces
- Marriage
- An Individual Educational Plan (IEP)
- Publication of the child's photograph
- Non-emergency surgery or medical care
- Psychotropic Medications
- Vacations (when they interfere with court ordered visits)
- Permission to take the GED test
- Driving

Birth parents also have inherent "residual rights" that ensure they must be consulted in other areas of a child's life, including giving permission for altering the appearance of the child through tattoos, drastic hair cuts, and body piercing, including ear piercing. If in doubt always contact your placement worker before allowing the activity.

When the parents are deceased or their rights have been terminated, OCS has the authority to consent to some of the above situations. Others need to be approved through the courts. Since there are specific procedures for each of the above situations, you should always contact the placement worker to find out what is required.

Keeping Children Connected To Their Families

The Child's Feelings

A child in care may have many different and conflicting feelings about birth parents. The child may feel sad, angry, embarrassed or confused. The child may love the parents and feel guilty for breaking up the family or getting the parents in trouble. A resource family can help a child with these stormy feelings by keeping a nonjudgmental attitude about the birth parents. It helps to let the child talk about family members without your expression of disapproval of the family.

A child's family should be respected. If you have any negative feelings about a child's family, do not relay these to the child. Resource families are prohibited from making derogatory remarks about the child or the members of the child's family. Encourage a child to send birthday cards or take pictures or class work to show a parent at visitations. Do not minimize the abuse a parent may have done to a child, but point out the strengths and good qualities of a child's family. This keeps a good connection between a child and his family.

Respecting A Child's Culture Or Ethnic Heritage

If you are fostering a child who is from a different race or culture than your family, you are asked to promote a healthy sense of that child's culture. This may include making arrangements for the child to attend cultural events that reflect the child's heritage or continuing cultural activities that are familiar to the child. It may also mean making a special effort to serve cultural foods that the child may be used to eating.

Additionally, federal law ensures cultural continuity for Native children. This federal law is entitled the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and is a federal law passed in 1978 to protect Native families and communities by requiring states and child welfare departments to follow a specified preference when placing Native children in out of home care and notifying tribes when members and families are involved with such services. *(Please see glossary for more information on the Indian Child Welfare Act).*

The placement worker should tell you the name of the child's tribal affiliation or cultural group. With the placement worker, the resource family should jointly work with the parents, relatives and the tribe to identify cultural events, foods and activities important to the child. Local organizations, tribal associations and schools can also assist with local cultural events that may be relevant to the child. If you have a child from a different culture or race, make it a point to help the child connect to events that reflect his background. Churches and holiday celebrations are often good events to help a child connect. If a child is placed in a different community, often the best times for visits with family may center around community cultural events or gatherings. If a child will be spending a holiday or birthday in your home, ask how the child's family celebrated and try to incorporate some of the traditions into your celebration.

Visitations

If a child is removed from his family, OCS is required by law to provide reasonable visitation between the child and his parents, guardian and family members. Reasonable visitation will be determined by the nature and quality of the relationship between a child and the family member before removal. OCS may deny visitation to parents or family members if there is clear and convincing evidence that visits are not in the best interest of the child.

The placement worker will discuss visitation for any foster child in your care when the placement is made. The plan for visitation should be outlined in the *Foster Care Case Plan and Agreement* you receive at the child's placement. The placement worker should confirm any change in the visitation plan in writing. The placement worker needs your cooperation to ensure that visits are a positive experience for the child. Visits may take place at OCS offices, the parent's home, a public place, or the resource family's home with the permission of the resource family. With worker permission, you might 1) invite parents to the child's medical appointments, 2) invited parents to a child's birthday party or 3) ask parents to attend school meetings with you. Unless otherwise arranged, the resource family is expected to transport the child to visits. You should receive reasonable notice of a planned visit. If you have any concerns about a child's visit with a relative or friend, you should discuss it with your placement worker. You should also be clear about what kind of telephone contact is allowed between parent and child, or other relatives and the child (i.e. grandparents, aunts and uncles).

Some visits or phone contact may require supervision, meaning that a designated person needs to be present when the child visits the parents. This person may be a third party or the resource family if the resource family agrees.

You may be asked to let the birth parent visit the child in your home. This helps the child know that you trust his parents. The matter of parental contact in your home should be discussed with your worker. You also need to give permission before your phone number can be given to a birth parent.

Possible Problems In Visits

A parent may ask to take a child from your home or have contact with a child outside of the regular schedule. *Do not let the children go with the parent without the placement worker's permission.* If the birth parent demands you hand over the child in your care, do not do so. Encourage the parent to contact the placement worker or offer to make the contact. Keep telling the birth parent that you are not allowed to let the child have contact outside of the agreed visitation plan. If parents or other relatives become unruly in your home, ask that they leave. Contact law enforcement if necessary. Notify your placement worker immediately if any of these situations occur.

If a birth parent or relative arrives intoxicated to take the child on a planned visit, ask him or her to leave and contact the placement worker immediately. If the worker is not

available, the resource family may refuse to allow the child to leave with the parent or relative under these circumstances. If the parent demands that the child be allowed to leave, law enforcement may be contacted for assistance if the placement worker is unavailable.

In case of an emergency, such as parent not returning a child to your home as planned, contact the OCS or DJJ office immediately. If a child returns from a visit and shows any physical signs of abuse, contact the placement worker immediately.

It is not uncommon that children show increased behavior problems before and after a visit. This may include difficulty in sleeping, more defiant behavior, tantrums, and crying or general fussiness. This does not mean that the visits should stop. When children visit parents, often they are reminded of their separation or grief. They may not want a visit to end, or may become angry at their birth parent for missing a visit. They may feel a mix of loneliness, fear and confusion. These behaviors are to be expected. If children get violent, extremely ill or show signs of having been abused, it is very important that you notify the child's placement worker immediately.

Visits With Other Relatives And Siblings

The placement worker may discuss visiting arrangements with relatives and friends and request your help with such visits. If you believe that the child should be having visits with someone important in the child's life, discuss the matter with the placement worker. If a relative or friend contacts you directly about visitation with the child, refer the person to the placement worker. Do not confirm or deny that the child is in your home. Inform the placement worker about the contact. **Do not permit the child to visit with the individual without OCS or DJJ approval.**

If a child has brothers or sisters in other resource family homes, talk to the placement worker about the possibility of the siblings being allowed to visit one another. Often children are very close to their siblings and may miss or worry about brothers and sisters. If you feel a child would benefit from a visit, make arrangements through the placement worker.

Lifebooks

When a child is separated from family members, important information about the child's background and family can become lost. This is particularly true for young children. Even the child who is reunited with the child's family can experience loss because the child's parents may not be able to fill in the gaps about what happened during the time the child was in foster care. Many resource families find a Lifebook can be helpful to preserve a child's memories. A lifebook can be many things -- a scrapbook, a baby book, a photo album, or a journal that records a child's history while living with you. You can use a folder or save items in the colored placement packet envelope. Involve older children directly in this activity. Older children may have ideas of their own of what they want to save, or may want to assemble their own scrapbooks.

Relative Placements

Why Relative Placement ?

The Office of Children's Services strives to keep children close to their families and their culture. Following this philosophy, it becomes natural, then, to place children with people they know when out-of-home placement is necessary. When placing a child in foster care, OCS often seeks family members or relatives who are able to care for the child. If relatives can provide a safe place for children to live, it is the preferred placement. Relative care provides continuity for a child's culture and can lower the separation anxiety a child feels in out of home care. Per federal mandates through the ICWA, relative and/or tribal placement for native foster children is required.

If you are a resource family for a relative (such as a niece, nephew, grandchild or cousin), you are expected to comply with the case plan for family. You need to abide by the established visitation and contact schedule between parent and child. You cannot allow other visits or permit unsupervised contact if the case plan does not allow it. Relative resource families are also expected to support services for the child such as counseling or medical care. Relative resource families are also expected to follow the same guidelines for obtaining parental consent. This means a resource family can obtain emergency or routine medical care for a child, but if a child needs non-emergency or elective medical procedures or mental health medications, parental consent is necessary.

When you become a resource family to a niece or nephew or grandchild through a placement by OCS, your relationship with them has changed somewhat. When OCS is involved, it usually means that there is a child protection issue. OCS or DJJ will stay involved with the child and family until the case is closed. Licensed relative resource families are expected to support the case plan for the family and comply with all foster home regulations.

Financial Considerations

When you agree to care for a relative in OCS custody, you are entitled to assistance in one of two ways to help with the additional costs to your family. Since relative children are not living with their parent, the children usually are eligible for public assistance. This is called Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP) formerly known as AFDC. You need to apply for ATAP soon after your relative starts living with you. Public assistance payments can help with food, clothing and school costs for the children. Most children on public assistance are also eligible for Medicaid.

You may, however, instead of applying for public assistance, choose to apply to become a licensed foster home and receive reimbursements for providing care to a child in state's custody. Relatives who want to be licensed to care for family members must follow all licensing standards as all other resource families.

Expectations Of Being A Licensed Resource family

When you apply to become a licensed resource family, you are assessed against the same State regulations that all licensed resource family homes must meet. The rules include being screened for criminal history, which includes state and federal background checks and fingerprinting processes, agreeing not to use physical punishment, adhering to the foster care case plan, basic child proofing and safety efforts in your home, and fulfilling training requirements.

Your Boundaries With The Birth Parents

Relative resource families face a special challenge. Many times, the birth parent of your foster child may also be your relative: a sister, brother, daughter or son. You know these people well. Your relatives may ask you to bend the rules a bit when it comes to visits or not sharing information with a placement worker. Other family members may pressure you, too. The children's parent may accuse you of trying to turn the child against him or may try to turn the child against you. However, as a relative resource family, you have a legal responsibility to follow the case plan. Talk to your placement worker if you are having a difficult time. The placement worker may be able to intercede on your behalf.

Dealing With Your Own Grief

You may feel sadness or grief for what has happened in your family. If your own daughter or son is involved, you may feel as if you did something wrong in raising your children. It is natural to feel this. Don't let your feelings get in the way of caring for the child in your home. When children grow up and become parents, they may get involved with things

that have nothing to do with the way that they are raised. Especially when drugs or alcohol are involved, people engage in destructive behaviors that hurt their family. If you need to get help or talk about these feelings, seek help from your placement worker or a counselor.

Permanency Planning With Relative Placements

OCS tries to reunite children with their families whenever possible. Sometimes, parents may need to undergo treatment, complete a prison sentence or complete parenting classes before reunification can be considered. Until then, OCS will ask you to care for your relative. If the child is not able to return home, OCS will then seek a permanent placement for the child. Relatives willing and able to care for the child on a permanent basis are the first preference for a permanent placement for a child. You, as the relative currently caring for the child, may be asked to care for the child on a more permanent basis. This is a choice your family must make together.

10. Licensing Issues

What Is Licensing? ☆ Types Of Licenses ☆ Your Community Care License ☆ Licensing Requirements ☆ Renewing Your License ☆ Self-Monitoring Report ☆ Training ☆ Foster Home Records ☆ When You Want To Close Your Home ☆ Complaints Regarding Resource family homes ☆ Child Abuse Allegations ☆ Licensing Violations ☆ Enforcement ☆ Revocation Of License ☆ Appealing Denial Or Revocation Of License

What Is Licensing?

Licensing is a preventive program that reduces predictable risks to the health, safety and well-being of children in out-of-home care. In Alaska, the Office of Children's Services is responsible for the licensing of resource family homes as well as child care facilities, child care homes, foster group homes, maternity homes, residential child care facilities, and child placement agencies. The goal of licensing is "protection through prevention" by reducing risks to children ahead of time rather than intervening after a problem appears. Licensing sets standards for an acceptable level of care. Applicants must meet at least the standards specified in the licensing regulations to operate legally. Ongoing review and monitoring strive to help keep children in foster care safe.

OCS and all other child placement agencies must place a child for full time care in a licensed facility, such as a licensed residential child care facility or licensed foster home (unless a child is placed with a relative.)

Types of Licenses

There are three types of licenses a foster home may receive:

Emergency Provisional License: This license allows a foster home to receive a specified child for care and be paid before the full licensing assessment has been completed. It is good for no more than 90 days and may not be extended

Provisional License: This is a conditional license that is issued during a foster home's first year of operation OR when a licensed facility becomes seriously out of compliance with a licensing requirement but has an OCS approved Plan of Correction to resolve the noncompliance.

Biennial License: This license is issued after a licensing worker determines that licensing standards are being met on a continuing basis after the first year of operation. A biennial license is valid for two years unless revoked or modified because a facility is not meeting standards.

There are circumstances that will allow a six-month extension of a current license in order to allow further time for the completion of the process to renew the license. However, the resource family must have submitted their documentation for this extension to occur.

Your Community Care License

When your foster home has been issued a license, you will receive a document called a **Community Care License** that lists your provider number, your name, address, type of

license and any conditions limiting your license. Keep this in your records. You should also receive a resource family identification card for the same period as the dates you are licensed. This card may be helpful in getting services for children in your care or for obtaining reduced rates in your community as well as give you authority as a resource family parent.

Licensing Requirements

Licensing requirements are defined by law. The requirements a foster home must meet have been developed over two decades and include input from foster children, professionals, resource families and community members. The licensing worker or representative will be covering the regulations requirements in the “standard by standard” during the visit to your home for licensure. This visit usually takes 2 to 4 hours. Ask your licensing worker for a copy of the regulations summary for your own reference.

All the regulations are important, but here are a few defining requirements:

During your first year of providing care, you may care for no more than two children. After one year, you can care for up to three. In a regular foster home, no more than three foster children are allowed in care unless there is an approved variance. No more than a total of 6 children (including birth children) are allowed. Foster group homes may have different capacities (See **Chapter 11: Specializations.**) OCS may limit the number of children for whom a foster home or foster group home is licensed on a case by case basis, and may license a home for fewer than the maximum number usually permitted. Foster care may not be combined with adult or day care except on approval of a variance ensuring the local fire codes are met and the needs of the foster children are primary.

Each resource family parent needs to be at least 21 years old and have no physical, mental health or criminal issues that pose a risk to children as well as no history of a substantiated child abuse or neglect, or a history of domestic violence. Resource family parents, as well as anyone in the home 16 years of age and older, are required to have a set of fingerprints taken and must submit to a criminal history background check through the Department of Public Safety. A resource family agrees to abide by the regulations that govern discipline such as not using corporal punishment. Resource families must complete the mandatory minimum yearly training.

A foster home needs to meet basic safety requirements, such as having fire extinguishers and smoke detectors, storing firearms safely, childproofing as appropriate, and setting hot water temperature no higher than 120 degrees.

Most importantly, a resource family agrees to supervise and to actively provide support and positive family experiences to a foster child and to carry out the child’s plan of care.

Renewing Your License

Your license should have a beginning and ending date. At the end of your provisional license, you will undergo a review with your licensing worker. A home visit will be made. If the licensing worker finds a violation of regulations, you will be asked to comply with a Plan of Correction. For example, you might be asked to make a plan with the Alaska Center for Resource Families to obtain your required training hours or learn some positive parenting approaches. In serious cases of violation of the regulations, a resource family applicant may be asked to withdraw from being licensed or the application for license renewal may be denied.

Self-Monitoring Report

During the two-year period of your biennial license, you will be asked to fill out a self-monitoring report at the one-year mark. This self-monitoring report will be sent to you prior to the end of the first year of your biennial license. A self-monitoring report is a self-evaluation. Self-evaluation is a healthy process. Your licensing worker will send this self-evaluation form to you to complete and return. Being clear and direct in your responses may assist in obtaining any support necessary for you as a resource family.

Training

Regulations and Alaska statutes require resource families to complete yearly training to remain licensed. At a minimum, two parent homes are required to have fifteen (15) hours of training shared between the two of them. Each resource family parent needs a minimum of five hours. A single resource family parent needs 10 hours of training.

CORE training is required (with some exception) for all newly licensed resource families and will fulfill the yearly 10 or 15 hours of training. CORE is also offered via numerous self-study formats as well as on-site, via the website. Please contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families for further information.

Resource families are responsible for registering whatever additional training they receive with the Alaska Center for Resource Families by calling 1-800-478-7307. Resource families can fulfill training hours by attending OCS training, completing training or self studies provided through the Alaska Center for Resource Families, attending community or university classes, or through specialized training related to a specific child's needs. Training eligible to be counted toward the requirement includes subjects and topics related to foster care or parenting.

The Alaska Center for Resource Families contracts with Office of Children's Services to provide training and support for resource families. There are several methods of obtaining the required training, including self-study and web based training, all at no charge to you. Contact the Training Center at 1-800-478-7307.

Resource Family Home Records

Records Kept By OCS: Under Alaskan law, licensing files are for public inspection. This includes childcare facilities and homes, residential childcare facilities and resource family homes. The names of children in care and their parents are deleted to protect confidentiality. Your file is considered a public record. However, certain materials in your file are not open to the public:

- Material that is confidential under state and federal law (such as criminal or child protection information.)
- Material that is part of an uncompleted licensing or complaint investigation until the investigation is complete. Only the final report is made public.
- Records where disclosure would mean an unwarranted invasion of a person's privacy such as a physical or psychological report. Your background information form submitted with your license application is also not open to the public.

Licensing Records Kept By The Resource Family: The records you keep for yourself provide a file of materials that demonstrate compliance with licensing regulations. Your licensing worker may request these and has a responsibility to review these records. You may also wish to keep some records for your information or for your protection depending on the circumstances. Following is a list of records to include in your file.

- Keep your license, the name and phone number of your licensing worker (or local OCS worker), and the name and number of your worker's supervisor. It is advisable to keep a copy of the regulations and licensing summary for reference.
- Resource families are required to maintain and update records regarding medical, mental, educational, and behavioral services providers to the child. A record should be made for each child and all entries should be dated and signed by the person making

the entry. These records should be kept in a safe place, and must be provided to the placement worker when the child leaves your home.

- Keep a record of your training hours. This may include certificates, cards or signed letters from the training. The Alaska Center for Resource Families can help you record your hours. They can help you get a copy of the training hours you have reported to them. Call the Training Center at 1-800-478-7307 to find out about resource family training.
- Post your emergency evacuation plan and document your fire drills. Keep a written log of when you performed fire drills and who participated.
- Keep a copy of important plans, including your plans for supervision, reducing second hand smoke, or handling of firearms where applicable.
- *Regulations require that you retain your records for at least 3 years.* These records should be available to your licensing representative to review.

When You Want To Close Your Resource Family Home

When you no longer wish continue providing care, contact your licensing worker. Give at least 20 days notice. In addition, contact your placement worker if you have a child in care. For other notifications of changes to your home, consult the list and timelines outlined in **Chapter 4: Emergencies and Changes to Your Foster Home.**

Complaints Regarding Resource Family Homes

OCS receives two types of complaints regarding licensed providers:

- A child protective services (CPS) complaint. A CPS complaint alleges abuse or neglect of a child residing in a foster home. All CPS complaints are also allegations of licensing violations.
- A licensing complaint. Licensing complaints allege a violation of one or more licensing standards has occurred.

Child Abuse Allegations

OCS investigates all reports of harm to children, including those children in resource family homes. OCS staff will investigate reports of harm involving physical or sexual abuse and neglect of a child. If a complaint alleges that sexual abuse or bodily injury to a child or another criminal violation has occurred, this is also reported to the police. An OCS investigator, licensing worker, and law enforcement officer may jointly handle the investigation.

If a report alleging physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect in a foster home is received:

- OCS may remove the alleged victim and possibly other children placed in the home until the outcome of the investigation is known.
- If a report is substantiated, OCS will place a hold on all future placements in the home until the home has successfully completed a Plan of Correction or the license has been closed or voluntarily relinquished. The worker will notify the resource family of the hold on placements when the investigation is completed.

- Licensing staff will determine whether the home should continue to be licensed or whether to move to close the home. If the foster home continues to be licensed, licensing staff will design a Plan of Correction with the resource family.
- The investigation worker will notify all other workers who have children placed in a home where allegations have been made.

Licensing Violations

Licensing staff or other staff responsible for licensing will investigate incidents where a regulation or other standard is alleged to be violated. The licensing worker will receive the complaint and take down as much information as possible. The licensing worker will then contact you or visit your home to investigate the complaint. Based on the results of the investigation, which includes talking with you, the children involved, and others, the complaint will be found to be *invalid* (the preponderance of evidence shows the violation did not take place) *unconfirmed* (the preponderance of the evidence is not conclusive either way) or *substantiated* (a preponderance of the evidence shows the regulation was violated). You will receive the results of the investigation in writing. This report also goes in your file. If the complaint is *substantiated*, your licensing worker may also detail recommendations or requirements that you need to follow in order to come into compliance with regulations. Failure to follow the worker's plan may lead to a revocation of your license.

Enforcement Regarding Your License

If licensing violations continue or fail to be corrected under a plan of correction, OCS may take certain actions to safeguard children while these situations are being remedied. Options may include:

- Modification of a license such as fewer children allowed in the home.
- Putting a hold on placements in your home.
- Changing to a provisional license until violations are remedied.
- Removal of children from your home.
- Revocation of your community care license.

Revocation of License

The last step in the complaint process may be revocation of a foster home's license in the interest of safety and well being of children. If this happens to you, you may first be approached to voluntarily give up your license. If you choose to do that, you also give up the avenue of appeal. If you refuse to give up your license voluntarily, your license may be revoked. Revocation means that your license is no longer effective and you are not a legally licensed foster home. A revocation notice will contain a letter explaining the action and the accusation, detailing the circumstances that led to the decision to revoke your license, and quoting the statutes or regulations that were violated.

Appealing A Denial or Revocation of License

Upon receipt of the notice of revocation, you have 15 calendar days to submit a written request to OCS for a hearing. A Notice of Defense form will be sent with the notice of revocation of your license. If you wish to appeal the revocation, fill the Notice of Defense out and return it to OCS within 15 days. You may wish to consult with and be represented by an attorney. A hearing officer is appointed to hear the case, issue a report of facts to the

Commissioner and recommend a final course of action. The hearing officer's recommendation will be sent to you or your attorney. The Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services issues a final decision, which also will be sent to you or your attorney and will be filed with the Lt. Governor's office.

Grievance Procedure/Resolution

Your first course of actions should always be to address your concerns directly to the party involved (for example the placement worker or licensing worker). When resource families and OCS workers try to work as a team, they often are able to resolve conflicts and disagreements in a way that is in the best interest of the child. Many complaints and difficulties can be resolved informally if resource families and social workers communicate with each other. If these actions do not seem to resolve the difficulty and you feel that additional action needs to be taken, you may wish to contact the employee's supervisor and explain your concerns.

If you have a complaint with OCS and cannot resolve your complaint informally with your placement worker or the supervisor, there is a grievance procedure you, as a resource family, may access. The Grievance Procedure is a formal way to ensure your complaint is considered at a higher level of supervision.

If you decide to file a grievance, you will receive a Complaint Form as well as copies of grievance procedure regulations (Alaska Administrative Code 7 AAC 54.205-7 AAC 54.900) which explains the grievance process in detail. You can also download a copy of these forms from the OCS website under "Publications" section. You can also request this packet from an OCS supervisor. You must complete the form and submit it to an OCS supervisor.

You can file a grievance on the following issues:

1. the application of an OCS policy or procedure;
2. an action or failure to act by OCS; or
3. an OCS licensing investigation, only after the investigation is complete.

The grievance procedure is not available:

1. to a resident of a state-operated juvenile correctional facility for which procedures developed by the superintendent under 7 AAC.52.095 apply;
2. to a state employee unless the employee is also a client of OCS, a client's parent or guardian, or a service provider for OCS;
3. for contract or service agreement disputes;
4. to appeal late payments or to contest paid rates;
5. to complain of child placement or removal decisions of the OCS as a result of intervention under Alaska Statute 47.10;
6. to complain of a denial, involuntary conditioning, suspension or revocation of a license for which an appeal is available under Alaska Statute 44.62;
7. to appeal a decision regarding grant programs for which an appeal is available under 7 AAC 78.310; and
8. to appeal a decision regarding civil rights actions covered under the department's civil rights complaint procedures.

Please contact your placement worker's supervisor or the Foster Care Program Coordinator in Juneau for further information on submitting a grievance to Office of Children's Services.

11. Specializations

*Why Specialize? ☆ Self Chosen Specializations ☆ Approved Specializations ☆ Emergency Shelter
☆ Pregnant and Parenting Teens ☆ Independent Living ☆ Foster Group Homes ☆ Placement
Agency Resource family homes ☆ Specialized Agreements ☆ Stand-by Homes ☆ Treatment
Foster Group Homes ☆ Emergency Shelter Foster Group Homes*

Why Specialize?

Many resource families are willing to care for children of any age or need who come into the child protection system. Other families find it helpful to specialize. In order to make a successful placement, resource families need to identify their assets and skills and take children into their home that match those skills. Specializing means that there is a certain type of child that you agree to work with. You may wish to restrict the age or sex of the children placed in your home. When resource families are specialized in one or more areas, it allows OCS to match the placement of a child with the skills of the resource family, thus increasing the chance of a good experience for both parent and child.

Some specializations are *self-chosen*, meaning you identify the children you feel you can work with most successfully. Your license will indicate the age range of children you are willing to accept. Other specializations are *approved specializations* or may be part of *specialized foster care agreements* contracted with the state.

Self Chosen Specializations

If you are interested in working with the special needs of children coming into care, you are encouraged to let your placement or licensing worker know. You will be asked during the licensing process if you prefer to work with a specific type of child or behavior. Some of the areas you may choose to specialize include:

- adolescent care
- attention deficit disorder
- behavior disorders
- delinquent youth
- children with developmental delays
- teen parent support
- emotionally disturbed children
- children with prenatal alcohol exposure
- children with hearing impairments
- infant care
- medically fragile children
- children with physical disabilities
- sexually abused children
- children with visual impairments
- young children

Self-specialization is not a formal designation on your license. It is an acknowledgement of your comfort and expertise in caring for a child with a special need. You may choose to do most of your training in this one area. An advantage in choosing an area of specialization is that it allows you a better understanding of the children placed in your care and allows OCS to know that you are comfortable and capable in taking a child with a special need. Some resource families specialize in two or three areas.

Approved Specializations

A resource family home cannot represent that it specializes in the following types of care without approval of the specialization from OCS. These specializations should appear on your license. If a resource family home is to be designated to specialize in any of these areas, the family may need to meet additional requirements. Each of these specializations also needs to be licensed as a foster group home if they care for more than three foster children or have more than six total children in the home. The specializations include:

Emergency Shelter

Emergency shelter homes are available to take children on an emergency basis. A resource family home providing emergency shelter care may accept placement from one agency only and shall have one resource parent generally available in the home. In an emergency shelter home, children can be placed on short notice without a prior visit or with less than 24-hour notice. Emergency rates will be paid to the resource family for the first ten days of the child's stay. When a child is placed in an emergency situation, the resource family conducts a brief health review of the child to determine any immediate physical needs and secure medical or dental treatment if necessary. Children stay in the resource family home until an appropriate placement setting can be found or they are able to return home.

Pregnant and Parenting Teens

These specialized resource family homes care for pregnant and parenting adolescents. The home may care for the pregnant adolescent before or after the adolescent gives birth and may provide care as needed to mothers and their infants. Infants not in custody are counted in the total number of children allowed in the home. These homes may use available community services to provide services as long as they are documented. Resource families are required to have training in areas like pregnancy issues and infant and early childhood development. Resource families educate pregnant and parenting adolescents. They ensure adequate and consistent prenatal care and prepare the adolescent for decision making in relation to their own children. These homes help pregnant and parenting teens to develop independent living skills and obtain health and education services in the community.

Supervised Transitional Living

These resource family homes specialize in providing care for teens for which family reunification or adoption is not feasible. A foster home with a specialization in supervised transitional living shall provide training and support, or assist a teen to access services that will help the youth successfully prepare for the transition to adulthood and independent living. Additionally, check with your placement worker to obtain information on Independent Living resources and funds available through Casey Foundation.

Foster Group Homes

The foster group home designation allows a foster home to care for up to 8 children total, including the resource family's own children. Of those eight children, no more than two

children under 30 months can be in care. If more than six children are in care, one resource family parent generally must be available in the home. The foster group home is meant to meet a specific need in Alaska. Situations arose in the past where a family was willing to care for a sibling group (brothers and sisters) but the placement would result in more than 6 children in the home. Another situation may include a group of four siblings that needs to be placed together, but only 3 foster children are allowed in any one foster home. Foster group homes may be used to alleviate these regulatory barriers.

Foster group homes have specific space requirements for indoor and outdoor recreation space for children. There should be at least one full bathroom for every six children in care. If a foster group home has more than five children in care, a fire safety inspection is needed. If a foster group home has only one exterior door, no more than six children can reside in the home. Additional space and safety standards are required for group homes. Contact your local licensing worker for further information.

Placement Agency Resource family homes

A child placement agency is an agency that arranges for the placement of children with foster or adoptive families or in a residential childcare facility. There are about 30 licensed child placement agencies in Alaska. A placement agency must be licensed by the State of Alaska. Placement agencies must adhere to and follow the licensing standards used by OCS. Placement agencies are usually operated by a non-governmental social service agency, a mental health agency, an agency that provides services for children with development disabilities, or a tribal organization. Some agencies specialize in adoption or guardianship while others specialize in foster care placement. Some handle both and offer a broad range of services for families. Placement agencies review applications, complete home studies, and recommend homes to be licensed. OCS is the agency that issues all foster care licenses in the state.

Placement agencies are agencies that make placement decisions for the homes that they use. Placement agencies may be agencies that specialize in locating families to care for a specific group of children or wish to provide more specialized treatment for families under their supervision. The resource family homes regulated through placement agencies specialize in addressing issues for the clientele the agency services. If you are a home working with a specific placement agency, you will be supervised by the placement agency that places children in your home. Before taking a placement from an agency other than the agency you are affiliated with, such as taking an OCS child if you are already a Hope Cottages foster home, permission must be obtained from your primary agency.

If a complaint is made against your home, the placement agency will consult with OCS and may investigate moderate licensing violations with the approval of the OCS licensing representative. If an allegation of child abuse or neglect is made, the child placement agency foster home will be subject to the same investigation protocol as an OCS foster home.

Specialized Agreements

In a few instances, OCS may purchase specific services from a resource family home that has specialized skills that meet specific needs of children in OCS categories. Specialized Agreements require a written agreement between OCS and the resource families. These specialized agreements may be one of the three following categories.

Stand-by Homes

Stand-by homes are available to take children during the evening hours on an emergency basis. A stand-by home may accept placement from one agency only and shall have one resource parent generally available in the home. The children who stay in an emergency stand-by home are usually runaways or children taken into custody in the middle of the night. Upon emergency admission of a child to the home, the resource family conducts a brief

health review and secures medical or dental treatment if necessary. The stay in a stand-by home is usually for a few days only.

Stand-by homes receive the emergency reimbursement for the days a child is in care as well as an ongoing stipend for keeping beds open and available for children. Again, while the reimbursement for the actual days a child is in care is not taxable, the stipend for keeping beds open needs to be reported to the IRS. For stand-by homes, OCS usually seeks resource families with several years of experience of providing care. Stand-by homes currently operate only in a few locations in the state. Please check with your licensing worker or the Foster Care Program Coordinator to determine if there are stand-by homes in your area, or if you wish to apply to become a stand-by home.

Treatment Resource Family Group Homes

Treatment resource family group homes are homes with a high level of skill in a specialized area and a capacity for full-time supervision. Treatment resource family group homes are contracted for specific services and must have three years of licensed foster care experience or the equivalent. The homes must have two parents, or one parent and a caregiver available for full time supervision. These homes need to collaborate with members of each child's treatment team to implement home treatment strategies defined in the youth's treatment plan. Treatment homes are required to keep written records regarding children's behavior and progress as well as follow the case plan in the home. The treatment resource family group home works with children and adolescents who have intensive needs, such as sexual offenders or severely emotionally disturbed children.

Emergency Shelter Foster Group Homes

The Emergency Shelter Foster Group Homes was implemented in late 1997 and are homes that agree to be available to take children on an emergency basis. These homes are available 24 hours per day seven days a week for the reception and care of children. This type of home specializes in caring for children placed for a short period from a few hours up to 10 days. The home maintains a foster group home license for at least five children and maintains an admission/discharge log. It operates 24 hours and can keep children through the day. These differ from the stand-by homes in that they are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and may keep children up to 10 days. These homes differ from standby homes in that: they are not reimbursed for days children are not in care; they are reimbursed at a higher rate than a stand-by home for actual days of care; and they are licensed as a foster group home and therefore can serve more children.

12. Case Planning and Legal Considerations

When A Child Is In Care ☆ The Case plan ☆ Timelines ☆ OCS Internal Reviews ☆ Court Hearings ☆ Guardian Ad Litem/CASAs ☆ The Citizens Foster Care Review Board ☆ Special Issues For Resource Families ☆ Confidentiality ☆ Reporting Suspected Abuse And Neglect ☆ Ongoing Communication With The Social Worker ☆ Nondiscrimination ☆ Permanency Planning ☆ Adoption ☆ Legal Guardianship ☆ Permanent Foster Care ☆ Independent Living/Emancipation ☆ Indian Child Welfare Act ☆ Foster Parent Grievance Procedure

In 1998, the Alaska legislature made the biggest changes in Alaska's child protection law since the early 1970's. Many of these changes were based on the changes enacted in a piece of federal legislation called the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). Both of these laws aim to minimize the time children spend in out of home care and to work toward permanency for these children. Both laws establish that the court shall keep the health, safety and well being of the child as the court's paramount concern.

When A Child Is In Care

The resource family has the very important job of the day-to-day care for a child in custody. While you are caring for the child, a series of legal and case planning actions begin. For each child in the custody of OCS, there needs to be a formal plan for the child and the child's family. This is called the case plan. In addition, if it is eventually determined that a child's family cannot be reunited successfully, a permanent plan of care for the child needs to be developed. The laws apply equally throughout the state. However, due to geographic, resource availability or cultural considerations, practice and casework may vary from field office to field office.

The Case plan

For every child in custody of the Office of Children's Services, a case plan or a written plan of care and treatment is required. This case plan must be completed within 30 to 60 days of the probable cause hearing. Ideally, the case plan is developed with the family, the placement worker and if applicable, the tribal worker. This case plan needs to state the current overall permanency goal for the child and the plan of action to reach that goal. The Foster Care Plan and Agreement that you sign when a child is placed with you is part of the case plan. When a child is placed in out of home care, the initial goal is to reunite a child with the child's family if possible. If the child in care is 16 years or older, the case plan must include an objective which addresses programs or services to help the child prepare for independent living.

When it appears likely that it may not be possible for the child to return home, a concurrent alternate plan may be developed. Concurrent planning means that two case plans are developed at the same time. One plan includes services that try to reunite family. The other plan is for permanency for the child if he cannot be reunited with his family. Concurrent planning is intended to minimize the time between out of home placement and permanency for a child.

OCS must provide and document reasonable efforts to help families remedy the conditions that caused out-of-home placement of their child. In some situations, a court may

determine the standard of reasonable efforts to enable the safe return of the child to the family home does not apply. If the court rules that the reasonable efforts standard for reunification do not need to be applied, OCS can move toward a different permanency plan for the child, which may include adoption, guardianship, or another permanent placement.

As a resource family, you have a right to a copy of the case plan and a copy of the Foster Care Plan and Agreement and should keep those copies in your files. If you do not have either within 30 days of placement, contact your worker or worker's supervisor to obtain a copy.

Timelines

While a child is in foster care, OCS must follow certain timelines in working with the family and the child. Upon taking emergency custody of a child, OCS must file a petition within 48 hours and appear before the court for a *probable cause hearing*. This hearing determines if there is enough evidence to warrant immediate intervention. The *adjudication hearing* determines if a child is considered a Child In Need of Aid (CINA) and needs to be held within 120 days of the probable cause hearing. The *dispositional hearing*, which determines custody of a child, is held either at the same time or within 30 days of the adjudication hearing. The *permanency hearing* must be held within 12 months after a child is placed in an out-of-home placement. OCS must offer time limited family support services designed to enable a safe return of the child to the family home until the court determines that such services are no longer required. If a child has been in state's care for more than 15 of the last 22 months, OCS must file for termination of parental rights unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.

OCS Internal Case Review System

Cases are reviewed at staffings/group conferences at appropriate times throughout the case to ensure that case decisions are based on the best interests of the child, address the health and safety of the child, and expedite permanency for the child. Case reviews ensure that the case plan is updated as needed and that services are provided to either reunify the family or achieve an alternate permanent placement. The case plan must be reviewed and, if needed, revised, at every formally required staffing. The service level must be reviewed and, if relevant, modified and changed, at least prior to each six months review, and may be reviewed at any formally required staffing. The service level and case plan also are reviewed at any time a new report of harm is substantiated, or there is any other major change in the case status. The case review system includes a number of staffings/group conferences which differ in the specific purpose of the staffing, the participants, and the content depending on the time in the course of the case, the permanent plan, and other circumstances of the case. Notification of conferences/reviews is provided at least ten working days prior to the review. Resource families are invited to most of these reviews.

The case review system includes the following staffings: children and family early conference, out of-preference staffing (ICWA cases only), administrative review (IV-E review/6 month review), permanency planning staffing, and placement decision staffing. For each specific case, whenever it is appropriate, staffings are combined.

Children and family early conference is held within 90 days of the probable cause finding for all children who are in custody and in out-of-home placement. The purpose is to assist in meeting the statutory requirements for the timelines for permanency and concurrent planning, for providing services to families, identifying potential barriers that may hinder service provisions to families, and for children not to linger in the system.

Out of-preference staffing (ICWA cases only) is held every 30 days when Native children are placed outside of the ICWA placement preferences. The purpose is to monitor these cases and document efforts to bring the cases into ICWA compliance.

Administrative review/IV-E review/6 month review/ CRB Review is held every six months on children who are placed out-of-home. The purpose is to review the continued

necessity for and appropriateness of the placement, the extent of compliance with the case plan, and the extent of progress made towards alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating placement in out of home care. Resource families who attend in person should bring the Placement Packet and any updated educational or medical records pertaining to the child. Resource families do not participate in the portion of the review specifically addressing the birth parents.

Permanency Planning Staffing is held whenever the permanency planning goal for a child is changed. The purpose is to recommend the permanency planning goal and appropriate permanent placement home for the child. For all children in out-of-home care, a staffing must be held in preparation for the permanency hearing. When the worker recommends that the child's permanency planning goal be changed to adoption or when a termination petition must be filed by law, or when guardianship is the permanent plan but the parties do not agree with the plan, specific termination related issues must be addressed, and if termination is considered a determination must be made whether or not termination is in the child's best interest.

Placement Decision Staffing (optional) is held as soon as adoptive or guardianship home studies are completed and ready for review by the staffing team and there are either multiple options for permanent placement, or no options. The purpose is to designate the permanent adoptive or guardian home for a child. The staffing is held separately from the permanency placement staffing, if needed, but is often combined.

Court Hearings

For each child who has been taken into OCS custody, the court must review the reasons for custody and continued custody must be approved by the court. Out-of-home placement of a child must also be approved by the court. Court hearings are held at least once a year. Resource families must be given notice of court hearings regarding foster children in their care, and the resource families are entitled to be heard at the hearing. However, the court may limit their presence at the hearing to the time during which their testimony is given.

Guardians Ad Litem / CASAs

When a child is placed in out-of-home care, the court appoints a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) to advocate for a child's best interest. The GAL reviews the information and may talk to the child, placement worker or resource families. The GAL then makes a written recommendation to the court based on what they perceive as actions in the best interest of the child. The GAL may be an attorney, trained advocate, or staff member of the State of Alaska Office of Public Advocacy. In the Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks and Mat Su areas, a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), a trained and supervised volunteer, may fulfill this role under the supervision of a Guardian Ad Litem. You may be contacted by the GAL or CASA regarding how the child is doing in care. The GAL or CASA may also want to talk with the child. To find out who the GAL is for your child, ask your placement worker. If someone presents himself as a CASA or GAL, always ask to see identification.

Special Issues for Resource Families

Confidentiality

OCS is responsible for maintaining confidentiality of all information concerning the people it serves. This responsibility extends to you in the performance of your duties as a resource family parent. The placement worker will be sharing all necessary information with you about the child that enables you to care for the child. The standard of sharing

information is on a “need-to-know” in order to provide appropriate care and safety for the foster child and other children in your home. You are expected to respect the privacy of the child and the child’s family by keeping information about them confidential. This includes making sure that the records of a foster child in your care are kept in a safe place. You may share pertinent information about children in your care with other individuals when necessary for the provision of care, treatment or supervision of the child. Appropriate information can be shared with doctors, teachers, counselors or baby-sitters. Particular attention in sharing identifying information about a child and/or family via email with others is very important. Using initials only about individuals covered under confidentiality is required.

You should be especially careful not to share background information about child abuse/neglect or the child’s family with your relatives, friends or neighbors. You should not identify a child as a foster child when possible. When speaking about the child in the child’s presence, it is important to be sensitive to the child’s feelings so he or she is not embarrassed or singled out as being different. It is also important to talk to your birth children about the foster child’s privacy and confidentiality.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse And Neglect

Under the State of Alaska reporting statute, certain persons are required to report suspected abuse and neglect. These mandated reporters include resource family parents. If in the performance of your duties of a resource family you have reasonable cause to suspect a child has suffered harm as a result of child abuse or neglect, you should report the suspected harm immediately. It is not the intent of the reporting mandate that persons investigate suspected child abuse or neglect before they make the required report. You should report any suspicions of harm or past harm to a child in your care when you have a reasonable cause to suspect that abuse or neglect has occurred. If you are not sure whether or not to report, then report. It is the duty of OCS to determine if an allegation will be investigated or not.

Ongoing Communication With The Social Worker

You as a resource family parent have a valuable window into how a child is adapting and adjusting. Often a resource family will see problems before a placement worker will. It is important you notify the placement worker when you see any problems, concerns or behaviors that might be unusual or indicative of a larger problem. This is especially important if you are seeing behaviors such as sexual acting out, depression, physical aggressiveness, mental health problems, suicidal or extreme anti-social behaviors. Keep the child’s placement worker informed through telephone calls, confidential email or voice mail messages or written documentation. If you need to talk to your placement worker and you cannot contact the worker or if you need to talk to someone immediately, contact the placement worker’s supervisor or your licensing worker or for assistance.

Nondiscrimination

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was approved July 2, 1964. This act is intended to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs. No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin or handicap, be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under a program or activity receiving federal financial assistance for child welfare services. The Alaska foster care program receives federal funding and therefore, cannot discriminate in the provision of services.

If you believe you have observed any discrimination by staff or a vendor, such as providers of medical services, in relation to the services this agency provides to foster children in your home, you should inform your placement or licensing worker.

Permanency Planning

The goal for the child for the first year of placement is nearly always an attempt to reunify the family. However, within the first few months of placement, the worker starts to evaluate whether reunification is a realistic goal for the child. When it is appropriate for the case an alternate plan may be developed and pursued concurrently with the goal of reunification. By the time of the first six-month review, it is usually clear whether reunification is realistic and whether a concurrent plan is appropriate. At about nine months, or earlier in some cases, the OCS evaluates the success of efforts to reunite the family, the needs of the child and other factors, including how long the child can wait to have a permanent family. OCS then recommends an appropriate permanency planning goal for the child. Within one year of when a child has been placed in out of home care, a court hearing is held where the court reviews the facts of the case and determines whether reunification is the appropriate permanency planning goal for the child. If it is determined that an alternate goal is more appropriate, the worker starts to implement the alternate plan.

If reunification is no longer feasible, the child's case goal will become one of these permanency options: **Adoption, Legal Guardianship, Permanent Foster Care or Independent Living/Emancipation.**

Adoption

The primary purpose of adoption is to ensure that every child, including children with very special needs, has a family who can give them the love, care, protection and opportunities essential for their healthy personal growth and development. It is the right of every child to be part of a family.

The objective of the OCS adoption program is to place all children for whom adoption is the goal through the effective recruitment of families willing and able to be adoptive parents. To be eligible for adoption, the child must be in the legal custody of the OCS and if old enough, be accepting of the concept of adoption. In addition, parental rights must be terminated or voluntarily relinquished, although in some cases it is possible to make a legal risk/foster adopt placement prior to legal termination if it is in the best interest of the child.

a. Adoptive Placement of Non-Native Children: In making recommendations regarding adoptive placement of non-Native children, OCS must first consider placement with relatives unless, after careful consideration and review, it is found not to be in the best interest of the child.

b. Adoptive Placement of Native Children: In making recommendations regarding adoptive placement of Native children, OCS must follow the guidelines of the Indian Child Welfare Act. The order of preference for the adoptive placement of Native children are:

1. A member of the Native child's extended family.
2. Other members of the Native child's tribe.
3. Other Native families. Preference goes to a family that share the child's Native/Indian heritage and language group. If attempts to find a family of similar heritage and language fail, then preference moves to consider a different Native/Indian Group.
(Any other placement is outside of the ICWA placement preferences.)

If you are interested in adopting a foster child who is in your home, talk with the OCS worker to determine the child's legal status and where you fit according to the preceding placement preference rules.

Legal Guardianship

Legal guardianship is another option in making a permanent plan for a foster child. Guardianship is appropriate for children who have developed a close relationship with their resource family and for a number of reasons cannot return to their own homes and adoption is

not feasible. Guardianship is a legal process by which another adult is given custodial responsibilities for the child. This option may be recommended by the permanency planning staffing for certain older children or children in relative placements, where the child may not wish to be adopted, or the cultural customs are most closely followed by guardianship. In any case, the guardianship family must commit to be the child's guardian until the child reaches 18. The guardianship must be approved through a court proceeding.

A Note on Adoption and Guardianship Subsidies:

Under both federal and Alaska statute, adoptions of special needs children may be subsidized, in order to assist the adoptive family in meeting the needs of the child. Special needs children may include children over the age of five, sibling groups, minority children, and children with physical or emotional disabilities. Subsidies are negotiated on an individual basis with the adoptive family. Since 1990, Alaska law also allows for subsidy of certain types of guardianships.

Permanent Foster Care

When reunification is no longer the goal, but termination of parental rights is not feasible or for some other reason adoption or guardianship is not possible the permanency planning staffing may approve permanent foster care as the permanent goal for the child. Formalized permanent foster care may be appropriate when it would allow the child to remain in a stable placement that has exceeded one year, and other permanency goals are not feasible for legal or casework reasons.

If permanent foster care is to be implemented, the worker will first discuss the option with the resource family and the child to see if this is something wanted by both. The placement worker then presents the case to the permanent placement staffing team.

Emancipation, Preparing For Independent Living

Emancipation may be the best option for children in OCS custody who are at least 16 and who will in all likelihood reach the age of majority while in the foster care system because a permanent family plan is not possible. Emancipation is a legal procedure in which a youth is released from a guardian's control. Emancipation is a major step in a young person's life. It has serious and immediate consequences. The responsibilities of adulthood can be overwhelming for a person who does not have a stable living situation and a steady income. For this reason, emancipation will only be granted to a minor who is living responsibly on his or her own. Emancipation must be approved by a judge and the youth must be at least 16 years old, be living separate and apart from guardians, be able to support himself and manage his own affairs. A young person emancipated by a judge has the same rights and responsibilities as any legal adult with the exceptions of: not being able to buy, sell or serve alcohol until 21 years of age; not able to vote until 18 years of age; and, not able to buy tobacco until 19 years of age.

- For other children in care who are 16 years or older and are in foster care, federal requirements require that some form of preparation for independent living be included in their case plan. The OCS worker may ask your assistance in providing education and assistance in teaching a child skills that would allow him to live independently as a young adult. For youth in out-of-home care who are 16 years or older, limited federal funds are available to provide for educational and vocational preparation costs. The child's social worker applies for these funds through a special funds request. If you are preparing a child for independent living, contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families for materials to help in this area. Areas in which youth should receive independent living education include:

- money management
- obtaining housing
- sexuality education

- vocational or employment training
- legal services

Resource family homes can help a youth locate:

- birth certificate
- social security card
- driver's license
- education record
- medical records
- job resume
- reference letters
- list of known relatives, addresses, phone numbers

Indian Child Welfare Act

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law passed by Congress in 1978 to protect Native families and communities from the loss of their children. ICWA requires state courts and child welfare agencies to respect the need for Native children to grow up within their own culture. The act applies in the following circumstances:

- Whenever OCS or an individual starts a court case which might result in Native children being removed from their home
- Whenever there is a court case to terminate a parent's right to Native children
- Whenever a Native child is moved from one foster home or institution to another foster home or institution
- Whenever a Native child is placed for adoption
- Whenever Native parents or custodians want to voluntarily place their children in foster care or relinquish their parental rights.

When Native children are placed outside their home in foster care or being placed for adoption, OCS must try to follow the order of placement preference that is mandated in ICWA. The placement preference for adoptive placements is explained under adoption above. Following are the placement preference for foster care placements.

1. A member of the child's extended family;
2. A foster home licensed, approved, or specified by the Indian child's tribes
3. An Indian foster home licensed or approved by an authorized non Indian licensing authority or
4. An institution for children approved by an Indian tribe or operated by an Indian organization that has a program suitable to meet the Indian child's needs.

In Alaska, tribes have the option of signing the ICWA State Tribal Agreement and may, under this agreement, change the order of preference for placements of their children as well as exercise other options. If you have a child from a Native family in your home and you are not Native, you are asked to keep the child connected with his Native heritage in whatever way you can. (See the glossary for definitions of ICWA eligibility, tribe, tribal organization, and ICWA worker.) For more information on the Indian Child Welfare Act, contact your regional ICWA worker or the ICWA Program Coordinator.

The Indian Child Welfare Act does not apply to delinquent youth in placement.

13. Resources for Children in Out of Home Care

*Directory of Office of Children's Services Offices ☆ Map of OCS Offices ☆ ☆ OCS * National Foster Parent Association ☆ Alaska Center for Resource Families ☆ Foster Care Providers of Alaska ☆ Anchor Foster Care Association ☆ Other Statewide Resources ☆ Healthy Alaskans Information Line ☆ PARENTS, Inc. ☆ Alaska Council on Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*

Directory of Regional Offices

The Office of Children's Services has one central state office in Juneau that administers and oversees the resource family system statewide, and four regional offices that individually serve the Northern, Southcentral, Anchorage, and Southeastern Regions. On the next page is a map of the OCS offices throughout the state.

OCS STATE OFFICE:

Office of Children's Services
Department of Health and Social Services
350 Main Street, Fourth Floor
P.O. Box 110630
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0630
(907) 465-3191

REGIONAL OCS OFFICES:

Northern Regional Office
751 Richardson Hwy. Suite 300
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
(907) 451-2650

Anchorage Regional Office
550 W. Eighth Avenue, Suite 304
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
(907) 269-3950
Out of Anchorage: 1-800-478-4444 (Alaska only)

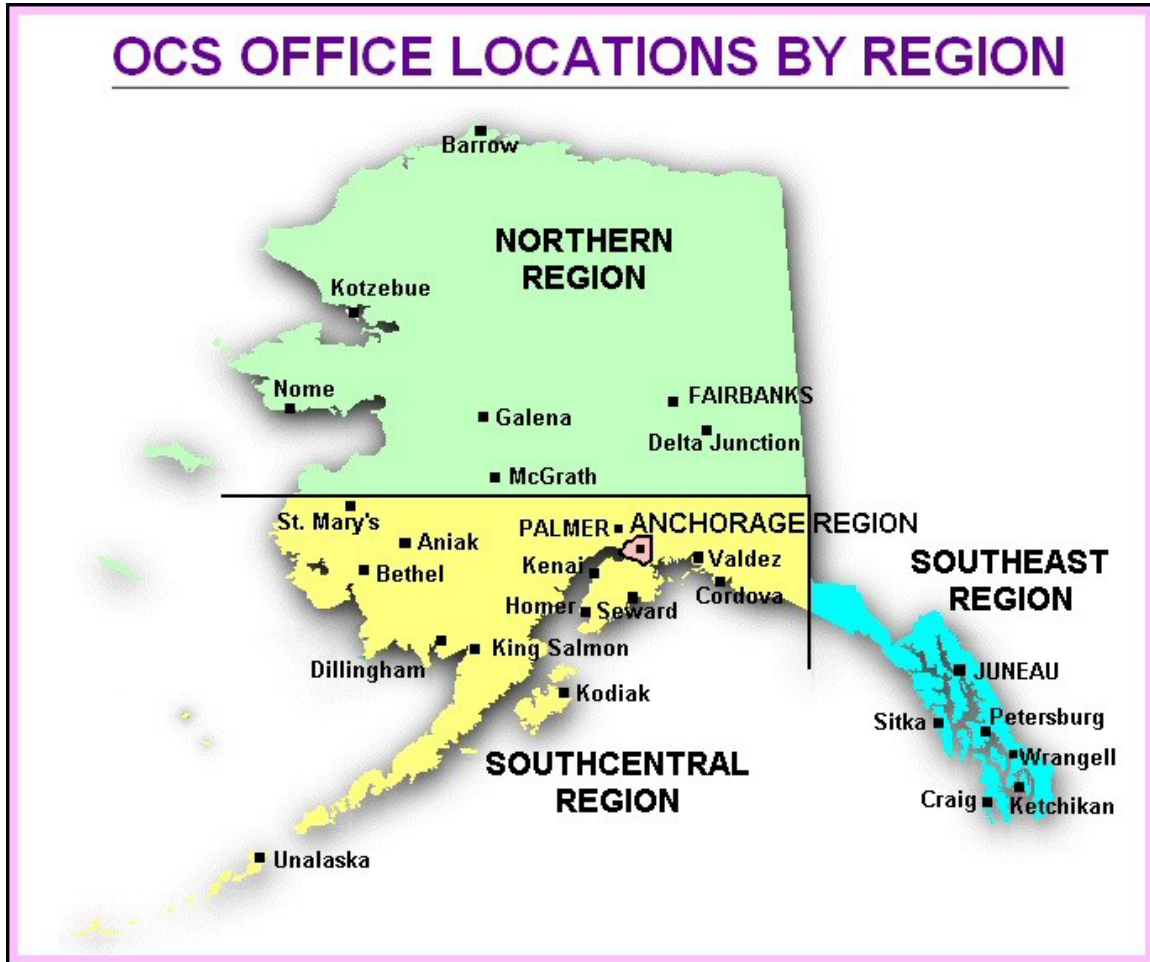
Southcentral Regional Office
695 East Parks Hwy., Unit 3
Wasilla, Alaska 99687
(907) 357-9780

Southeastern Regional Office
3025 Clinton Drive, Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801
(907) 465-1650

You may also learn more information about OCS offices through the Internet, including the location of the OCS office nearest you. Visit the Web Site at

www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs

Department of Health and Social Services
Office of Children's Services Office Locations



OCS Central State Office is located in Juneau.

OCS Regional Offices are located in Juneau, Anchorage, Wasilla, and Fairbanks

Field Offices are located at each site designated on the above map.

Foster Care Resources:

National Foster Parent Association

Address:
7512 Stanich Avenue, #6
Gig Harbor, WA 98335
Phone: 1 (800) 557-5238
1-253-4000
www.nfpainc.org

The National Foster Parent Association brings together resource families,, agency representatives and child advocates into a coalition for foster children and foster families. The intent is to promote mutual coordination and communication among all parties in the system; to improve foster care services; to enhance and assist in the recruitment of new foster families; to encourage training and education for resource families; and to inform the membership of current information pertaining to children needing foster care services.

The National Foster Parent Association sponsors a conference every year in May. Each year the conference offers intensive training with workshops on the topics most needed by resource families and workers. Membership allows reduced registration fees for the conference and entitles member to receive the quarterly magazine, *The National Advocate*.

The Alaska Center for Resource Families

Phone: 1-800-478-7307, (907) 479-7307 (Fairbanks).
Anchorage: 907-279-1799
Juneau: 907-790-4246

Web-Site: <http://www.acrf.org/>

The Alaska Center for Resource Families (ACRF) is operated by Northwest Resource Associates under contract with the Office of Children's Services. ACRF is responsible for conducting statewide resource family training and support. The main office is located in Fairbanks at 815 Second Avenue, Suite 101,. Additional ACRF offices are located in Anchorage at 840 K Street Suite 101, (907) 279-1799 and Juneau at 9109 Mendenhall Mall Road Suite 6A, Juneau, AK 99801 (907) 790-4246.

Anchor Foster Care Association

Address: Anchor Foster Care Association
PO Box 211245
Anchorage, Alaska 99521-0124.
www.anchorfca.com
No phone listed currently.

The Anchor Foster Care Association is the resource family group operating in the Anchorage, Eagle River and Chugiak areas. Anchor is a great resource for those resource families living in the Anchorage bowl or a good information source for other areas of the state interested in beginning their own associations.

Other Statewide Resources:

Healthy Alaskans Information Line

Phone: 1-800-478-2221

The State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services sponsors a toll free number to call when looking for resources throughout the state regarding health, counseling, social services, treatment programs, recreation programs and education services. A computer database is kept containing resources throughout the state.

P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.

Phone: 563-2246 or 1-800-478-7678

Web Site: www.parentsinc.org

4347 E Northern Lights Blvd.

Anchorage, AK 99508

907-337-7678

1-800-478-7678

TTY: (907) 337-7629

PARENTS, Inc. is a statewide agency that works with parents and resource families of children with special needs. They offer information and referrals, training and supports, and educational resources. They run workshops and offer assistance in the area of IEP and Special education plans and sponsors Pathways, a statewide conference for parents and professionals featuring a variety of workshops and nationally known speakers. If you have a child with a disability and want information on resources or educational materials, PARENTS, Inc. is an excellent resource.

14. Glossary Of Commonly Used Terms

A.C.R.F. (may be herein and formerly referred to as A.F.P.T.C): Alaska Center for Resource Families. Contractor who provides statewide resource family training and support.

A.Y.I: Alaska Youth Initiative. Designed to serve children who experience Severe Emotional Disturbances (SED) and are at significant risk for out-of-state placement. Services are provided through AYI grantees who offer individualized “wrap-around” services for the child.

Adoption and Safe Families Act: Federal legislation signed in 1996 that enacts practices and guidelines for child protection agencies to expedite permanency planning to prevent children from lingering in

C.A.M.A.: Chronic and Acute Medical Assistance. Limited health care services for very low-income people not qualifying for Medicaid. This program is offered through your Division of Public Assistance Office.

Case plan: the written plan of care and treatment for a child in the custody of OCS. Collaboratively developed by OCS caseworker, child’s parents and tribal members. Includes the Foster Care Plan and Agreement.

Child: a person under 18 years of age

Child abuse or neglect: the physical injury or neglect, mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment of a child under the age of 18 by a person, under circumstances that indicate that the child’s health or welfare is harmed or threatened

Child in care: a child who is not a relative of the caregiver, unless in a relative foster home

Child placement agency: an agency that arranges for the placement of children with adoptive or foster families.

Community Mental Health Centers: Responsible for providing comprehensive mental health services to children with mild to severe mental illnesses or emotional disturbances. Contact your local OCS or Division of Behavioral Health office for more information.

Concurrent Planning: Developing two case plans at the same time. One plan includes services that try to reunite a family in a way that will keep the child safe. The other plan is for permanency for the child if he cannot be reunited with his family. Concurrent planning is intended to minimize the time between out of home placement and when the child is free for a permanent placement.

Continuity: keeping children connected to their families, culture and community. It also means preventing gaps in the child’s history that are caused by living in several different homes.

Corporal Punishment: the infliction of bodily pain as a penalty for a disapproved behavior. This includes shaking, spanking, delivering a blow with a part of the body or an

object, slapping, punching, pulling or any other action that seeks to induce pain. Corporal punishment is prohibited with foster children.

Developmental disability: General term for any significant handicap appearing in childhood/adolescence, which will continue for the life of the individual.

DHSS: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

Family Centered Services: a method of service delivery that focuses on family. Culturally appropriate, community based resources are used to protect an/or rehabilitate children, protect dependent adults, strengthen families, promote permanency and reduce the incidence or duration of out of home placement. Safety of children remains paramount.

Fetal Alcohol Related Birth Defects: previously commonly known as FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorders); current term to describe variety of disorders that are associated with prenatal exposure to alcohol such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE).

- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)—potential result in baby from consumption of alcohol during pregnancy; includes any or all physical and/or mental/psychological deficits including microcephaly, growth deficiencies, developmental disabilities, hyperactivity, heart murmurs, skeletal deficiencies.
- Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE): potential result in child from consumption of alcohol during pregnancy; can be characterized by hyperactivity, memory disorders, language learning problems, and/or motor deficits; not as severe as FAS

Foster Care Plan and Agreement: the plan of care for a child while in a foster home. The written plan includes information about the reason for placement, goals for placement, expected dates of duration or placement, medical information, education information and specifics about visitation. Is part of the overall case plan for the child.

Foster home: a place where the adult head of household provides 24 hour care on a continuing basis to one or more children who are apart from their parents

Foster group home: a foster home in which one or more resource families operate not more than one group home for no more than eight children

Guardian Ad Litem: a guardian ad litem (GAL) is appointed by the court to represent the best interest of the child and make recommendations to the court. A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a volunteer position under the supervision of a guardian ad litem that fulfills this role by visiting with the child, reviewing records, talking with resource families and placement workers

Home and Community Based Waivers: Waiver allowing individuals who require a level of care that historically would have required institutional care to instead, be cared for in their community and/or home. For children, CCMC (Children with Complex Medical Conditions) and MRDD Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities are offered; both are administered by the Division of Behavioral Health.

Immediately: as soon as is reasonably possible and no later than 24 hours

ICF/MR: Intermediate Care Facility for Mentally Retarded: facilities for individuals not needing full and complete institutional care; no such facilities currently exist in Alaska. However, this level of care requirement must be met in order to qualify for Home Community Based Waivers.

I.C.W.A., Indian Child Welfare Act: a federal law passed in 1978 to protect Native families and communities by requiring states and child welfare departments to follow a specified preference when placing Native children in out of home care and notifying tribes when members and families are involved with such services.

I.C.W.A. Eligibility: For a child to be covered by the Indian Child Welfare Act, the child must be a member of a tribe OR be the biological child of a member of a tribe & eligible for membership in a tribe. There is no requirement that the child and the parent be members of the same tribe - as far as the ICWA is concerned. While most tribes will have a requirement of lineage of some sort, there are going to be exceptions to that rule, and there will be instances where a child is a member of one tribe and cannot be a member of the parent's tribe. Some tribes may allow dual enrollment.

I.C.W.A. Workers: Tribes and tribal Organizations receive some federal funding to assist with implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act in regards to their member children. Tribal "ICWA" workers' goals are to work for the best interest of the Indian child within the context of the family and the tribe

Licensing worker: means an employee of the OCS or an individual or organization responsible for evaluating a facility and presumes review and approval of the representative's decision by the OCS or organization

Neglect: failure by a person responsible for the child's welfare to provide necessary food, care, shelter, clothing and medical attention for a child.

Office of Children's Services; OCS: offices responsible for the care, safety and well being of children in State of Alaska's custody. OCS is comprised of one Central Office; four regional offices, and numerous field offices located statewide.

Out-of-home: care provided by a foster home, foster group home or residential care facility when a child is removed from his birth parent's home

Permanency Planning: case plan for a child who is unable to be reunited with his birth family.

Placement: arranging for and supporting a child in a foster care or residential setting.

Placement worker: means an employee or volunteer of a child placement agency that arranges for placement of a child in a residential childcare facility or a child foster home. Placement workers include employees of OCS who have responsibility for the placement of children.

Relative: an individual who is related to another through any of the following relationships, by blood, adoption, or marriage; parent, grandparent, great grandparent, brother, sister,

stepparent, step-sister, step-brother, cousin, aunt, uncle, great aunt, great uncle or step-grandparent

Residential Child Care Facility: a place staffed by employees, where 1 or more children who are apart from their parents receive 24 hours care on a continuing basis.

Resource Family: any provider for child placed in out of home care (i.e., foster, adoptive, adoptive/guardianship, tribally licensed home, relative placement).

Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (SED): general descriptive term for a group of persistent disabling mental and emotional disorders with profound impact upon the ability of the child to adjust to home, school and the community.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): Social security program assisting mentally and/or physically disabled individuals whose income levels qualify them for federal assistance. Administered through the regional Offices of Children's Services.

Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act (TEFRA): Medicaid waiver allowing only children's resources and income to be counted towards eligibility requirements, disregarding other household members' income and resources.

Tribal Organizations: Some Tribes have developed non-profit regional organizations or associations within the same geographic area as their Regional Corporations to provide education, vocation, and human service benefits for individuals having tribal membership with one of the tribes in their region.

Tribe: For purposes of the Indian Child Welfare Act, "tribe" is defined as including any recognized Indian tribe and the villages listed in Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. There are currently over 225 federally recognized tribes within the State of Alaska. Most villages in Alaska are federally recognized tribes for the purposes of the Indian Child Welfare Act

Variance: a waiver from a licensing requirement or regulation that is approved in writing by the OCS. Does not waive safety and well-being requirements; usually used for differences in home size to allow for placement of sibling groups. Variances must be applied for, are reviewed by a Variance Committee, and an approved plan to meet the varied requirement must be included.

Young Child: a child age birth up to age 9

15. Resource Families' Bill of Rights

Resource families have the right to:

1. *Be treated with respect, consideration, personal dignity and privacy.*
2. *Be included as a valued member of the service provision team.*
3. *Receive support services that assist in the care of the child in their home, especially a timely, open and respectful response from caseworkers and agency personnel.*
4. *Be initially informed and constantly updated of all information regarding the child that may impact the resource home or family life during the care of a foster child.*
5. *Have input into the permanency plan for the child in their home.*
6. *Assurance of safety for family members.*
7. *Assistance in dealing with family loss and separation when a child leaves the resource family home.*
8. *Be informed, and kept informed, of all agency policies and procedures that are related to the role of a resource family caregiver.*
9. *Receive training that will enhance the resource family's skills and ability to provide adequate and safe care for children.*
10. *Be informed, and kept informed, of how to receive services and reach personnel on a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week basis for emergencies.*
11. *Confidentiality, within statutory parameters, regarding issues arising in the resource family home.*
12. *Not be discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, sex, national origins, age, or physical disability.*
13. *Receive evaluation and feedback on their role as resource family provider.*
14. *Receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with the care needs of the child as agreed to in the Foster Care Plan and Agreement.*
15. *Be given reasonable notice of and opportunity to participate in any court hearings concerning the foster child in the home.*
16. *Be notified of any decisions made by the courts, the tribes and/or the agency concerning the foster child in the home.*
17. *Be provided a fair, timely and impartial investigation of any complaints of the resource family home, including the result of any such investigation.*
18. *Be provided assistance in filing a grievance against the agency or agency staff when requested by a resource family.*
19. *Continue the family values and routines in the resource family home.*
20. *Timely and impartial response from the placement agency when a resource family requests removal of a child.*